

“THE BRIDGE BETWEEN SESSIONS”: THE NATURE OF DISCOURSE
IN A NOVICE TEACHERS’ BLENDED COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

**MANDY BEAN: The Bridge Between Sessions: The Nature of Discourse
in a Novice Teachers' Blended Community of Practice
(Under the direction of Jocelyn Glazier)**

Providing sustainable, meaningful professional development to novice teachers in order to support the rising demands encountered in schools continues to exist as an ongoing challenge in education. One type of professional development that is understudied in the literature is blended Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for novice teachers. Following two sets of participants through two separate 3-month iterations, this qualitative study examined the nature of discourse for a group of new teachers in a pre-existing discourse community when combined with an online component. Using discourse analysis, the conversations in both the face-to-face and online sessions were examined for content themes, participant interactions, and the impact the two contexts—face-to-face and online—had on one another. Findings highlight participants' use of certain discourse patterns including active listening and laughter that exemplified a Community of Practice in the face-to-face discussions. Though absent in the online component in iteration one, these discourse patterns became apparent in the online component of iteration two when the conversation flowed between the face-to-face and online components. Reasons as to why the second iteration developed into a blended community in contrast to the first iteration are considered, providing fodder for future new teacher induction efforts.

This work is dedicated to my sister and best friend, Maggie Bean.
You are the best sissypants in the world.
And you are always the smartest and funniest person in the room.
I love you to the moon and back.

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CHAPTER 1

BLENDED COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOR NOVICE TEACHERS: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

“It’s tough out there for a teacher.”

Anonymous teacher, Facebook, February 2014

“The community creates the social fabric of learning.”

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002, p. 28

One does not need to be omniscient to know that current structures in education have created much strain on the careers of teachers. From inadequate salaries with low to no yearly pay increases, to larger class sizes as well as diminishing human and material resources (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007), some might agree the future does not look much brighter. Despite this troubling reality, teachers continue to enter the profession through traditional schools of education as well as through alternative routes (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ludlow, 2013).

The hiring and subsequent retention of qualified teachers has become a major focus in education today, as attrition levels for novice teachers continue to rise with an estimated 40 to 50% of teachers leaving within their first 5 years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Many schools strive to provide effective instructional support to novice teachers through induction, a multifarious program focused on socialization and enculturation into schools (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Additional supports include professional development aimed at improving specific curriculum-based and/or pedagogical-based teaching skills as well as supports focused on improving teachers’ self-confidence. Yet, many efforts are not as successful

as anticipated, in part because more effective efforts are cost-prohibitive (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Researched effective supports, such as mentoring and coaching (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Gentry, Denton, & Kurz, 2008; Heider, 2005; Ippolito, 2010; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Vanderburg & Stephans, 2010), come at a higher price than many school systems have in their budgets. However these expenses are far less than the overall financial expense of teacher attrition according to calculations by the United States Department of Labor (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). According to the Department, U.S. school systems have spent \$4.9 billion a year on teacher turnover, or approximately \$12,350 per teacher (Corbell, Osborne, & Reiman, 2010). In an analysis of teacher turnover, teachers reported the top two motives for leaving the profession were job dissatisfaction or a career change (Baker-Doyle, 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Although it should be noted that some degree of turnover is “normal, inevitable, and beneficial” (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 49), Darling-Hammond’s (2003) assertion that, “effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource for schools – and one that needs to be treasured and supported” (p. 7) should also be heeded.

A viable and reasonably affordable approach to providing the support Darling-Hammond (2003) recommends is the teacher discourse community as professional development. This opportunity to engage in professional dialogue is advantageous for all teachers as “a growing body of literature indicates that professional development experiences are particularly effective when situated in a collegial learning environment, where teachers work collaboratively to inquire and reflect on their teaching” (Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009, p. 210). Furthermore, Feiman-Nemser (2003) indicated that the ultimate success of novice teachers relies on the ability of teachers to engage collaboratively with other teachers on a regular basis. Teachers need the

opportunity to meet with other teachers to engage in professional conversations and reflect on teaching practices. Beginning teachers, in particular, need a time and a place to openly discuss concerns related to teaching without fear of being evaluated by administrators. To be successful, new teachers require a supportive work setting where they can assemble into communities of reflective learners (Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

Purpose of the Study and Problem Statement

Researchers have well documented the limitations of conventional professional development formats (Clark & Florio Ruane, 2001; Garet et al., 2001; Little, 1993), which have been characterized by Borko (2004) as mostly “fragmented, intellectually superficial and do not take into account what we know about how teachers learn” (p. 3). An alternative to these traditional professional development configurations is the blended Community of Practice (CoP) that combines face-to-face dialogic interactions with a virtual community. In a professional learning community such as a blended CoP, teachers are “situated in a collegial learning environment ... work[ing] collaboratively to inquire and reflect on their teaching” (Whitcomb et al., 2009, p. 210).

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the addition of an online technology component to an established CoP for novice teachers, called *Reconnect and Recharge*, to determine the impact of blended CoPs on novice teacher learning. The project involved recent graduates from a southeastern university’s teacher education programs who reconvened for *Reconnect and Recharge* (R&R) four times during the school year for approximately 4 hours each time. While in grade-specific discourse communities, the participants explored the successes and challenges they faced as new classroom teachers. The novice teachers problem-solved dilemmas they were experiencing as new teachers and, secondarily, discussed how

teacher education curricula could be more aligned with the challenges teachers face in 21st-century classrooms.

Although R&R has received many positive comments on written self-evaluations by the participants, one critique of the program has been the large interval of time between sessions. With four scheduled meetings per year, there is significant lag time, with anywhere between 6 weeks and 3 months between discourse sessions. According to the framework provided by experts (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2005; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), CoPs should meet frequently in order to build a successful foundation for learning. Unfortunately, the budget constrains the ability for R&R to meet more regularly. As a result of the intermittent nature of these sessions, the addition of this study's online technology component introduced the possibility of augmenting this particular CoP to create a more cohesive, supportive, and responsive community. This research sought to examine how participants experienced the blended CoP model and its impact on them.

Support for Novice Teachers

Dialogic Professional Development. Over the past 20 years, the number of novice teachers entering the profession has increased. In 1998, the majority of teachers had 15 or more years of experience; by 2008, a quarter of the teaching force had 5 or fewer years of experience and was the most typical teacher found in American schools (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Ingersoll (2012) has referred to this shift as the “greening” of the education profession (p. 49). Unfortunately, critics have condemned teaching as an occupation that “cannibalizes its young” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 28), as novice teachers are often left to manage many new situations in solitude. While isolationism exists in the professional lives of many teachers, it is especially detrimental during the first years in the profession (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Lortie, 1975).

Feiman-Nemser (2012) noted that “the early years of teaching are undeniably a time of intense learning, and they are also a time of intense loneliness” (p. 10).). Furthermore, this isolation has a negative impact, resulting in teachers leaving the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The isolation can be overcome in several ways, including the offering of professional development opportunities that encourage frequent collaboration and dialogue among teachers.

Unfortunately, collaborative professional development is far from the norm. Instead professional development comes in many different shapes and sizes, and not all experiences are equal in terms of their impact on teacher learning or support (Garet et al., 2001). For example, some teachers are required to attend all-day workshops and/or in-services on a regular basis, while others may be required to attend a conference or two. Typically, these forms of staff development occur in short timeframes, lasting 1 day to 1 week, where an expert teaches with a top-down approach. Regrettably, these types of trainings do not typically allow for ongoing professional growth and learning for teachers. Multiple studies demonstrate that teacher professional development must provide more advantageous conditions for knowledge acquisition than these traditional forms of professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Furthermore, it must be a process in which teachers are learning ways to incorporate new knowledge into their practice and is subsequently supported within a community of educators (Schlager & Fusco, 2003). According to the National Staff Development Council (NSDC),

Staff development that has as its goal high levels of learning for all students, teachers, and administrators requires a form of professional learning that is quite different from the workshop-driven approach. The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving. These teams, often called learning communities or Communities of Practice, operate with a commitment to

the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation and engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning. (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 13)

The aforementioned types of traditional professional development do not comply with the NSDC's recommendations for collaborative and continuous learning. Furthermore, conventional forms of professional development are often criticized for being unsuccessful in terms of imparting meaningful content as well as being an ineffective use of teachers' resources and time (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Garet et al., 2001). More collaborative forms of professional development in which teachers are making connections to their own practice tend to be more beneficial overall, as Whitcomb et al. (2009) noted: "Professional development programs [should] be situated in practice, focused on student learning, embedded in professional communities, sustainable and scalable, and both supported and accompanied by carefully designed research" (p. 208). Thus, these collaborative contexts are good for teachers and students alike. As Westheimer (2008) explained, "teachers, as much as students, require [collaboration] in order to live out satisfying professional lives in schools and create conditions of community for students" (p. 766).

Providing a collegial space for teachers to reflect on their classroom practices while gathering knowledge from others is the cornerstone for effective professional development (Garet et al., 2001). One such model of dialogic and collegial conversation is a Community of Practice (CoP), which emerged from Lave and Wenger's (1991) book on situated learning. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) defined CoPs as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). According to Wenger (1998), a Community of Practice defines itself along three dimensions: (1) a *joint enterprise* understood

and continually renegotiated by its members (2) *mutual engagement* that bind members together into a social entity, and (3) the *shared repertoire* of communal resources that members have developed over time. Based on a premise of collective expertise and designed to critically examine and ultimately improve education practices, CoPs provide situated learning opportunities for teachers and researchers to “share, build upon, and transform what they know about effective practices” (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003, p. 265).

Three key structural elements characterize CoPs: domain, community, and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). *Domain* represents the common ground where participants share their ideas, knowledge, and stories. *Community* is the group of people who learn and interact together, building relationships that result in a feeling of belonging and mutual commitment. Finally *practice* is the specific knowledge that the community develops, shares, and maintains. Wenger et al. (2002) noted that when these three elements function well together, a CoP forms an ideal “social structure that can assume responsibility for developing and sharing knowledge” (p. 29). For novice teachers in particular, these sociocultural communities provide a level of enculturation in which their learning is grounded in teaching practices and situated in meaningful contexts (Baker-Doyle, 2011; Crafton & Kaiser, 2011; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Engaged in rich intentional discourse at regular intervals, the community members of a CoP have the opportunity for the previously mentioned mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) that otherwise might not occur due to increased demands on both time and resources of teachers (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). In addition, CoPs contribute to a cycle of development and knowledge between practitioners and as “purposely constructed professional communities ... can be especially powerful influences on [teacher] learning” (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 388).

Discourse communities such as CoPs are a compelling source of teacher support. With emphasis on distributed cognition, teachers are able to participate and share experiences with other professionals while gaining knowledge essential for growth in the profession. According to Barab, MaKinster, Moore, and Cunningham (2001), an approach to professional development should be focused on “fostering a culture of sharing and providing sustained support for teachers as they evaluate both their beliefs and practices” (p. 74). Thus, the ability to provide quality sustained support cannot be stressed enough as novice teachers become members of their professional communities (Weinbaum et al., 2004). Weinbaum et al. (2004) described how collaborative communities such as CoPs open teachers up to questioning their practices and the practices of others, help them explore issues they identify as important, make their work public, and allow them to gain new ideas on their work while experiencing intellectual growth and renewal as a teacher.

Technology as Meaningful Professional Development. While discourse communities such as CoPs have gained prominence as an option for professional development, the use of online technology as a tool for delivering professional development to teachers has been on the rise in recent years (Kao & Tsai, 2009). This technology evolution can be seen in new professional development forums such as webinars, podcasts, and social networking sites (McLeod & Lehmann, 2011), among other Internet technologies. At first glance, technology-based professional development offers many advantages. The benefits include the ability to customize and individualize teacher support as well as the potential to accommodate geographical and/or scheduling obstacles (Thompson, Jeffries, & Topping, 2010). Dede et al. (2009) noted several benefits of technology-based professional development, such as “the opportunities for reflection offered by asynchronous interaction; the contributions of teachers

who tend to be silent in face-to-face settings but ‘find their voice’ in mediated instruction; and the unique affordances for learning of immersive virtual simulations” (p. 9). As Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) aptly stated, “Today’s networks ... make it possible for teachers and children to join communities of people well beyond their schoolhouse doors” (p. 187).

A significant amount of research has been conducted on how educators build virtual social networks for professional support (Baker-Doyle, 2011; Daly, 2010; deKlepper, Sleetbos, Van de Bunt, & Agneessens, 2010; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). Teachers are increasingly using technology to connect with colleagues using Web 2.0 (Bonk, 2009; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011; Starkey, 2012). Described as the “read and write web” (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009, p. 247), Web 2.0 enables users to create, use, and share resources (Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur, & Sendurur, 2012) and allows active participation and collaboration with others on social networks (Greenhow, 2009; Pettanati & Cigognini, 2007; Starkey, 2012). In many circumstances, Web 2.0 technologies have transformed how teachers find, interact, and work with one another, as no longer does one have to “personally know the people in our network to co-construct and collaborate with them” (Nussbaum-Beach & Hall, 2012, p. 11). In addition, for the teacher born after 1980, this type of online collaboration is more commonplace, as many “millennials recognize the importance of maintaining ties ... mainly through new technology” (Baker-Doyle, 2011, p. 3). Therefore, the social networks of most novice teachers are inherently connected through Web 2.0 technology.

Although the capacity to communicate with others via the Internet is advantageous in many respects, some possible disadvantages exist as well. For example, there is the potential for technological malfunctions to impede synchronous communication in particular, as glitches can cause a lack in continuity during real-time professional development opportunities. Furthermore,

it is important to recognize that the success of technology-based professional development is mediated by the teachers' comfort level when using Web 2.0 technologies. As Bos (2011) noted, "Technology knowledge is in constant flux and requires a deep and essential understanding as well as a mastery of technology for information processing, communication, and problem solving" (p. 169). This "mastery of technology" can be difficult for some teachers, due to myriad reasons from inexperience to resistance (Bonk, 2009). Concomitantly, any use of the Internet presents certain restrictions:

They are only as good as the data the user enters and retrieves. They still require the eyes and ears of the [user] to determine what to collect and how to record it, as well as how to interpret the data. (Fetterman, 1998, p. 29)

In other words, although computer technology can support new structures for collaboration, the tools themselves cannot bring about changes. The teachers' use of the tools is what defines how they can be supportive in instructional professional development.

Blended Professional Development. Recognizing there are both assets and drawbacks to using online technology as a medium for professional development, many teachers are transforming their teaching and finding innovative forms of support through a variety of formal and informal virtual and face-to-face communities. The option of blended professional development is well suited for an educator looking to build a connected community with some flexibility. With origins in the concept of "blended learning" for classroom purposes (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003), blended professional development such as a blended CoP combines face-to-face sessions with an online component. The rationale to participate in a blended community is multifarious, drawing on the need "to find a harmonious balance between online access to knowledge and face-to-face human interaction" (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003, p. 228). Some reasons related to blended CoPs are access to knowledge, varied

social interaction, strengthened personal agency, and increased cost effectiveness. Applying the notion of the best of both worlds, Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) suggested, “Those who use blended learning environments are trying to maximize the benefits of both face-to-face and online methods - using the web for what it does best, and using class time for what it does best” (p. 227), with meeting times replacing class time for the purpose of blended CoPs. Thus, to learn more about how blended Communities of Practice work – or don’t – for novice teachers, more research, like that shared in this dissertation, is needed.

The questions I explored for this study were as follows:

1. What is the nature of novice elementary school teachers’ discourse in a blended CoP?
 - a. What does a face-to-face community look like?
 - b. What does an online community look like?
 - c. What is the content of the discussions in the face-to-face and online CoPs?
 - d. What are the differences between face-to-face and online interactions for the individual participants?
 - e. How do the interactions in both environments impact each other and the participants’ overall experiences?

Theoretical Framework

This study was theoretically grounded in the body of work on Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2005; Wenger, 1998). As this study focused on the collaboration inside a Community of Practice interacting in a blended format, it was essential to employ this theory and its focus on the social construction of knowledge. In addition, this work builds from the tenets of discourse analysis (Tannen, 2005, 2007). Since talk is central to learning in Communities of Practice, I used the lens of discourse analysis when considering and examining the data.

Communities of Practice

Used by social scientists for a variety of analytical purposes, the theoretical foundation of Communities of Practice has origins in social learning theories (Wenger, 1998). According to this theory, by putting the principles of distributed cognition and knowledge-building pedagogy into practice, knowledge is no longer confined to individual minds, rather is it distributed among people and artifacts in the environment. The theory of CoP maintains that collaboration is the most effective method for constructing knowledge and obtaining shared meanings. Moreover, existing in every CoP is the specific topic (i.e., practice) that lies at the core of the community. This practice is the central focus, drawing the community together and providing the foundation for the collaborative culture. Lave and Wenger (1991) described a CoP as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping Communities of Practice” (p. 115). This description situates specific CoPs within larger networks or “constellations of practices” (Wenger, 1998, p. 126).

Several learning theories contribute to the structural framework of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Whereas sociocultural and socio-constructivist approaches to learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) help to provide a foundation for understanding how learning occurs in CoPs, the framework of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in particular is relevant. In straightforward terms, *situated learning* is learning that takes place in the same context in which it is applied. Lave and Wenger (1991) contended that learning should not be viewed as simply the transmission of abstract and decontextualized knowledge from one person to another; rather it is a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed among members of a community. Furthermore, they suggested that learning is situated in specific contexts and

embedded within a particular social and physical environment, as meaning is not separate from the practices and contexts in which it is negotiated.

Although CoPs exist in a variety of forms, they are all characterized by three fundamental elements, as mentioned earlier: “a *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a *community* of people who care about this domain; and the shared *practice* that they are developing to be effective in this domain” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 27, emphasis in original). *Reconnect and Recharge* is one CoP that fulfills these components, offering its participants a common ground to discuss dilemmas of practice with fellow teachers. The structure of *Reconnect and Recharge* is organized to offer all these attributes, and I hoped that the aspect of longevity in particular would be boosted by the addition of the virtual CoP.

Moreover, as CoPs are solidified when participants engage in a process of collective learning, the notion of distributed cognition (Hutchins, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978) is essential for this study. *Distributed cognition* maintains that knowledge, understanding, and expertise are not solely the property of the individual but are distributed among the community. This theory is essential to a CoP, in part because it plays a role in the concept of *legitimate peripheral participation*, the notion by which members of a CoP evolve from newcomers to old-timers (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This concept was significant for this particular study as the interplay of the experienced and the inexperienced is found in *Reconnect and Recharge* CoP through the delineation among members by the numbers of years of teaching as well as the number of years as a participant in the CoP.

Discourse Analysis

The means by which learning happens in CoPs is conversation. Therefore it was critical to ground my study in the tenets of discourse analysis (Tannen, 2005, 2007; Gee, 2005). Similar

to COP, discourse analysis is bound by ideas of social constructionism (Gee, 2005; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). While a method of analysis, discourse analysis is driven first by a set of theoretical understandings about how learning happens. Essentially, discourse analysts posit that language is central to knowledge construction and that social interactions—be they spoken or unspoken-- guide that construction. Furthermore, in discursive psychology—a branch of discourse analysis—the focus is on “how people use the available discourses flexibly in creating and negotiating representations of the world and identities in talk-in-interaction and to analyze the social consequences of this” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 8). Discourse analysis in this framework examines “the ways in which people’s selves, thoughts and emotions are formed and transformed through social interaction”(p. 8) in a context like COP. In order to understand the nature of the CoP, and participants’ experiences within it, it was essential to understand the role talk plays in how learning and relationships occurs in the community. It is in and through participants’ talk that the CoP is created.

Operational Definitions

The following terms and definitions are key to my study.

Community of Practice (CoP): “a group of people linked together by a set of common beliefs or practices, where knowledge is gained through constant group interaction” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4); Must have the three components of domain (an area of knowledge or issues that attract people to the community), community (people who care about the issues), and practice (what is developed to impact the domain)

Blended Community of Practice: A model of a CoP that combines face-to-face meetings and online interactions

Novice Teacher: A teacher who is in the first 5 years of the profession

Online Community: A group of people that communicate via computer network or other electronic media such as email, websites, blogs or other online forums

Organization for Remainder of the Dissertation

As this study is centered on the issue of novice teacher support via a blended CoP, in the next chapter, I provide a review of the literature on dialogic professional development, the use of technology as a tool for support and communication, and blended communities for teachers. In the third chapter, I outline the research methodology for this qualitative study. In chapter four, I share findings from the study. Finally, in the fifth chapter I delve into a discussion of the findings as well as implications of this study for work in teacher education.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: DIALOGIC, TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED, AND BLENDED

As my intention of this study was to explore the addition of an online technology component into an established CoP for novice teachers to examine the effect of blended CoPs on novice teacher learning, my review of the literature focused on three major themes: (a) research studies on dialogic professional development, with emphasis on CoPs specific to novice teachers, (b) the use of technology in professional development, with a specific interest in online teacher support systems, and (c) research studies of blended professional development, with emphasis on those that provide support to novice teachers. I conducted the literature search for years 1984-2014, and found peer-reviewed literature using the electronic databases of Google Scholar, ERIC, Wilson Education Full Text, Psyc Articles, Psyc Info, and Teacher Reference Center. Keywords and phrases I used included *community* or *Communities of Practice*, *novice* or *beginning teachers*, *technology*, *support systems*, and *professional development*. Furthermore, I paid additional attention to articles that utilized similar theories and methods proposed for this study, including the use of CoP theory as well as the methods of discourse analysis and semi-structured interviewing.

Dialogic Professional Development in Communities of Practice

All studies examined for this section of the chapter provided examples of COPs as dialogic professional development models. As the research will demonstrate in this section, this sort of dialogic professional development can lead to the formation of relationships and shared

knowledge among group members, as well as provide other benefits. Reflected in the studies cited here are consistent references to critical components of COPs, such as resources shared among group members.

The concept of the CoP emerged from a collaboration of research between Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), who observed what they coined CoPs occurring in many different professions. In broad terms, CoPs are made up of individuals who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better through regular interaction with one another (Wenger, 1998). With origins in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural stance, the theory of CoP acknowledges a shift from an individualistic cognitive approach to a sociocultural approach whereby knowledge is distributed among the members. Wenger (1998) noted that learning starts with the assumption that engagement in social practice is a fundamental process by which we then learn and become community members.

The primary unit of analysis is not the individual as learner, or the institutions in which the learning occurs, but the *Communities of Practice* that participants form as they pursue shared enterprises. Furthermore, Wenger (1998) noted that the combination of mutual engagement within the community, a shared domain of interest, and a shared repertoire of resources and practices are the three essential features that constitute a CoP. In combining these three elements, the activities and tasks do not occur in isolation within a community; rather the focus is on the relationships among these three elements and the subsequent interactions of the members of the CoP. These three elements provided an initial lens for looking into the activities of the blended CoPs in my study.

Mutual engagement suggests that members jointly engage in dialogue, such as problem solving, information seeking, and requests for information. Without mutual engagement, a

community is more apt to represent a network of individuals or individual groups rather than a CoP. The essential requirement for mutual engagement is that the CoP provides an opportunity for community members to engage meaningfully in shared activities. In addition, mutual engagement builds relationships among people; however, mutual support and interpersonal fidelity cannot always be assumed. Conflict, disagreement, and challenge can often be typical forms of engagement within a CoP. Wenger (1998) noted, “as a form of participation, rebellion often reveals a greater commitment than does passive conformity” (p. 77). As such, the multiplicity of relations within a CoP can be diverse and complex, something I explore in my study.

The foundation of CoPs necessitate members develop a shared set of resources (Wenger, 1998), as meaning is negotiated in CoPs through a shared repertoire. This repertoire refers to a pool of resources that members not only share but contribute to as well. These resources can be physical, such as artifacts of written communication via email, or intangible, such as a common discourse or advice for accomplishing a task. As a result of the continued maintenance and development of a shared repertoire, Wenger (1998) suggested that the members are given a sense of identity, shared membership, and belonging within a community. A CoP lacking shared repertoire would indicate a dearth of shared points of reference from which members negotiate their collective goals.

The final element of a shared domain of interest, or joint enterprise, requires that the CoP possesses common interests and collective goals. Furthermore, joint enterprise necessitates developing the aforementioned collective resources. Such resources could include shared narratives, artifacts, discourse, and experiences. By sharing a common goal, members are

mutually committed to an endeavor that is considered relevant to all members of the community, and mutual accountability becomes an integral part of the practice (Wenger, 1998).

Additionally, within CoPs, learning can occur through the practice of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Concerned with the roles of “newcomers and old-timers”, legitimate peripheral participation is a process by which members of a CoP evolve from newcomers to become more active members of a community. This practice occurs by the newcomers participating in straightforward and low-risk tasks, enabling them to function as productive members and help to further the goals of the community. Through peripheral activities, newcomers will gradually become old-timers, as their participation takes forms that are central to the goals of the community. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (1978) is very similar to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) legitimate peripheral participation, as both ideas are connected to the interplay of the experienced and the inexperienced, and how learning is enhanced through their active engagement with one another.

Collaborative nature of discourse communities. The significance of *collaborative* discursive relationships as sites for teacher learning was central to the studies discussed below. In her study of the CoP comprised of secondary teachers, Little (2002) focused on how the CoP could provide the intellectual, social, and material resources for teacher learning. By observing the situated interactions of the secondary school teachers in their everyday work, the multilevel case study was designed to focus on “how teacher groups that consider themselves collaborative might produce or support instructional improvement” (p. 918). Little used audio and video recordings to capture the “ongoing occasions of collective teacher work” (p. 919), interviews and artifacts, such as school documents, to inform the study.

Looking systematically at the “ordinary, mundane exchanges among teachers” (p. 920) using discourse analysis, Little (2002) proposed a study design that would explore the relationship between teacher community, teacher development, and the improvement of practice. Exploring the specific ways a CoP provided for teacher learning in math and English secondary classrooms, Little sought to examine three areas: the participants’ *representation of practice* which is how the practice of a community comes to be known and shared; the *orientation toward practice*, with the idea that through collaboration the teachers would “ratchet up the quality of teaching and learning,” therefore “strengthen[ing] the knowledge and performance of individual teachers, especially novices” (p. 935); and *norms of interaction*, dealing with how participation and interaction are organized so as to enable teacher learning and the reform of practice. Little hoped this study could provide a frame for observing, describing, and analyzing the situated learning of teachers, admitting her own self-proclaimed difficulty while analytically looking inside teacher community. Little noted the study was “designed to build on—but also to deepen and challenge— research of the last decade that has steadily converged on claims that strong professional communities are important contributors to instructional improvement and school reform” (p. 937). Little noted it was essential to conduct further research into what is the nature of teacher learning when teachers have “daily participation in professional communities” (p. 937).

Little’s (2002) research shed light on the importance of ascertaining how CoPs achieve the desired effects of a dialogic community; for example, how does collaboration improve individual teacher knowledge and practice? This research is significant as it illuminates the need to know more about the inner workings of CoPs. As Little stated, “this is a timely moment to unpack the meaning and consequences of professional communities” (p. 937). Furthermore,

Little found three themes that merited future study: (a) the individual knowledge, performance, and commitment of teachers; (b) the collective capacity and disposition of the group; and (c) the development of practice by the group. Admitting that tracing these themes in natural environments will be challenging, Little emphasized the importance of conducting additional formal studies in order to explore how individuals develop professional practices within communities.

Finding time for the sort of intensive collaboration Little described in her study was one of the topics in a study by Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, and Brown (1998), as they explored an emergent CoP specifically designed for 18 elementary school teachers representing 14 different schools. The *domain* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for this new CoP focused on teaching inquiry-based science to students of low SES backgrounds. From the conception of this CoP, the authors acknowledged the challenge in which “teachers have few occasions for the informal exchanges upon which learning in a community of practice depends” (p. 6); therefore while designing the CoP they intentionally strove “to provide occasions for interaction, joint deliberation, and the collective pursuit of shared goals – that is, to nurture the community of practice” (p. 6).

With the common enterprise of improving the practices of teaching inquiry-based science, the teachers engaged in bimonthly meetings with the majority of the time committed to the presentations of individual members’ experiences with teaching in this new way. As the notion behind a CoP is that it provides a context that fosters learning and development through individuals’ participation in activities in the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the co-construction of knowledge for this particular CoP centered their science-inquiry conversations on the “intellectual activities of planning, enacting, and reflecting upon one’s teaching” (p. 10).

Among the conclusions drawn from this study was verification in respect to knowledge generated during the conversations in the CoP:

Fairly concrete evidence regarding the co-construction of funds of knowledge was provided by two school-based members of the community who, in presenting their [science-based inquiry] teaching to the rest of the community, began by documenting the influence that each member of the community had exerted on their teaching. (Palincsar et al., 1998, p. 17)

The participants' testimonies in regard to their membership in the CoP were "powerful" (p. 17), particularly in terms of how the CoP met both their professional and their social needs. An additional point of interest is the formation of this CoP for a specific reason. Although Lave and Wenger (1991) originally noted it was advantageous to have relationships established among the group members prior to beginning a CoP, this study along with others has refuted that particular pre-requisite (Babinski, Jones, & DeWert, 2001; Barab, Schatz, & Schleckler, 2004; Little, 2002; Thompson et al., 2010). Community and collaboration can be built within the CoP itself.

CoPs can support changes in teaching practice. Illuminated in the above studies was the idea that CoPs influenced participants' learning. Of interest in the studies cited here are the specific ways that CoPs influenced teacher practice. Turner, Warzon, and Christensen (2011) conducted a study on a CoP consisting of six middle school teachers searching for new ways to motivate their students in the classroom. During monthly meetings, the teachers engaged in conversations regarding how to build a culture of autonomy, belongingness, competence, and meaningfulness in their classroom. Qualitative data was collected through interviews and observations in order to understand how and if the practices of the teachers in the classroom changed as a function of participating in a yearlong collaborative CoP. Furthermore, the researchers were interested in which components of the CoP contributed to the trajectories of the six CoP members.

The *domain* for this particular CoP focused on the teachers' acquisition of new strategies for increasing motivation in their classroom. The group would observe new tactics for motivating students via videos, then collaborate and enact the new strategies during the CoP sessions. Among the three experienced teachers examined in this study, the researchers noted one teacher who appeared less interested in learning new strategies for engaging her students, as she "was easily frustrated and tended to abandon an attempted strategy if it was not immediately successful" (Turner et al., 2001, p. 735). This led her to become an obvious outlier in the CoP, a teacher resolved to blame her students for the lack of building a collaborative culture in her classroom, with an eventual effect of the students' behaviors undermining her attempts at using new "motivating" strategies. Much of the data regarding her practices was in sharp contrast to the other two members, as they were ultimately more successful at both creating a positive culture and stimulating their students' interest in solving mathematical problems. This presents one of the challenges of a CoP: members who may not fully contribute to the *domain* of the CoP as it was intended. During an interview, the outlier teacher reflected upon the collaboration in the CoP, noting that she "liked the sharing ... I picked up a lot from that" (p. 752), but when she was queried in regards to her attempts at teaching the new strategies, she cited her students as the problem – not her teaching. This suggests that although CoPs can generate a *shared repertoire*, *mutual engagement*, and *joint enterprise* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for its members, it may not influence all members equally in its *domain*.

Several patterns of interest emerged through the data. Like the previous studies cited, the theme of support gained through collaboration in the community, a vital element of CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991), was evident as the "monthly meetings provided opportunities for teachers to problem solve and learn from and help each other" (Turner et al., 2011, p. 753). Although the

outlier teacher was not willing to enact the instructional strategies and participate as the teachers connected theory to practice, the other five teachers embraced the opportunity, with the remaining making significant changes to their practice. Turner et al. (2011) recognized this change, noting an example of one successful teacher:

Through participation in the collaboration, [the teacher] had altered her practice and had changed her view of what students should and could do in mathematics. She was gratified with the changes in her students and felt more successful as a math teacher. (p. 749)

Although the group was not entirely cohesive, the goals of increased competence as well as fostering a sense of belonging were achieved in this mathematics teachers' CoP, reinforcing the idea of *shared knowledge* among community members (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Learning to engage in critical conversations. Moving participants in a CoP to the sorts of critical conversations about practice often lacking in schools can be challenging. Hoping to provide a place for critical dialogue, Daniel, Auhl, and Hastings (2013) examined teaching critical collaborative reflection to students majoring in elementary education. The qualitative study focused on the challenges experienced by a CoP of 65 first-year preservice teachers as they engaged in a process of reflection and critique with their peers while learning about early literacy pedagogy. In previous years, the authors observed that their students struggled with participating in critical dialogue with colleagues upon entering the teaching profession. Therefore, a program focusing on the core skills of teaching was enacted. This program included models of constructive feedback given by practicing teachers and professors as well as time for rehearsing these skills with their peer group.

Within this CoP, critical feedback became a regular part of the students' routine, although there was initially some resistance to this more evaluative type of discourse. Over a 12-week period, meeting for twice a week for 2 hours, the students were first introduced to new

pedagogical literacy skills then engaged in providing critical feedback to their peers. Although a structured model demonstrated how to give both affirmative and formative critiques, during the second week, 34.5% of the students felt there was “little to no benefit” to the program, noting “they found the collaborative feedback process challenging ... [and were initially] questioning its value” (Daniel et al., 2013, p. 165). Furthermore, the perception of “being mean” was a concern for some participants, as they “found it difficult to provide critical feedback to others” (p. 166).

By the eleventh week of the program, opinions of the program had shifted in a positive direction, with the preservice teachers “expressing greater understanding and satisfaction” (Daniel et al., 2013, p. 167) and only 18.5% of the students reporting discontent with the class. Moreover, 81.5% of the participants believed the program had at least some benefit, as many noted “a great impact... on the development of professional knowledge” (p. 168). The authors recognized the challenges this type of discourse had for their participants but judged the benefits of “having a growing awareness of the importance of critique” (p. 169) outweighed the initial struggles. In conclusion, Daniel and colleagues (2013) stated the study provided insight into the benefits of rehearsing collaborative critical discourse with peer groups, especially for preservice teachers. It’s important to note that although the authors of the study identified this group as a CoP, there is critique as to if this is merely a class comprised of students interested in similar content, rather than a CoP. As Wenger et al. (2002) explained, CoPs are distinguished from other types of communities by the possession of a cohesive goal and their longevity, among other attributes. It is not clear if this is the case for this preservice teacher group.

Similar to the Little’s (2002) previously mentioned study with secondary teachers, Little later collaborated with Horn on the examination of another dialogic community. Horn and Little (2010) looked into the critical conversations of two teacher communities located at the same

urban high school, focusing on the interactions by which professional community is “forged, sustained, and made conducive to learning and improvement” (p. 183). In addition, the authors were interested in whether the discourse communities were indeed discussing problems of practice in such a way that a greater capacity for professional learning evolved. They explored this through examining *conversational routines*, or the patterned manner that conversation unfolded, and *moves*, or the turns of dialogue that shape the overall conversations. Data included transcripts of weekly meetings, interviews, and participant observations. Of interest is the fact that the authors of the study became full participants in the study in part by taking over teaching positions on separate teams. The research team acknowledged this was an “unusual degree of access to insider meanings and practices” (p. 187) but accepted the challenges that full participation presented to maintaining a researcher’s perspective. Moreover, one teacher pointed out in an interview that it was “easier to talk about our bad days because we see that you have your bad days, too” (p. 188).

Conversational routines and moves proved to be viable sources for locating how discourse in professional communities led to professional learning. Dilemmas found in the everyday practices of these teachers were examined via two comparable, yet contrasting extended sessions for the separate communities. During a routine meeting of the algebra team, a novice teacher relayed the “mayhem” (Horn & Little, 2010, p.193) of her last lesson. The retelling of her difficulties led the community to a deep discussion of the issues faced by this beginning teacher, resulting in the group providing support through multiple perspectives and opportunities for the new teacher to “reconsider the source of the mayhem” (p. 196). The dialogue also moved fluidly from the specific to the general, as the teachers “conversationally constructed general frameworks for thinking about teaching problems [and] provided durable

tools for their work” (p. 202). This is an important outcome to note in reference to this study of CoPs, as one goal of a CoP is the *practice*, or the specific knowledge that the community develops, shares, and maintains (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For this particular community of algebra teachers, the exchange of problems of practice, with the ultimate result of teacher reflection and learning, demonstrated the magnitude of teachers’ participation in dialogic communities.

In the other community, contrasting views on a written assignment led to an experienced literacy teacher initially disregarding a novice teacher’s contribution to a professional conversation. Although the specific problem of practice, introduced by the novice teacher, was ultimately *normalized* by the group, the larger issue of the problem being a recurring issue went unexamined and the “normalizing moves functioned to turn collective attention away from the problem of practice” (Horn & Little, 2010, p. 207). Although this community did eventually solve the singular issue raised by the novice teacher, it was apparent that the *domain* of this community was disharmonious. In order to account for the differences seen in these communities, the authors focused on three conditions that varied between these communities. The importance of a “shared frame of reference” was seen a key factor for these communities, as the algebra community had “honed a common set of conceptual tools and principles, rooted in shared professional development experiences” (p. 209). In contrast, the literacy community “commanded fewer conceptual resources for describing and analyzing problems of practice” (p. 209), leading the group to be less open and mindful when it came to sharing and discussing important issues. The other two salient differences were the extent that the teachers taught a common curriculum and the leadership styles of the groups. These components are also important for CoPs in terms of the *domain* and *community*, therefore their significance as a

finding in Horn and Little's study draws attention to the need to include aspects of *domain* and *community* in all dialogic communities. These become important elements for critical conversations in a CoP

The potential for novice teacher discourse communities. As reflected in the studies above, CoPs have been examined with respect to experienced teachers and preservice teachers. More recent studies have focused on the potential of CoPs for novice teachers in particular. In a study of urban novice teachers predominantly trained through alternative routes, Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) explored the interactivity of elements of Wenger's (1998) CoP social learning framework in order to learn if a cohort, comprised solely of novice teachers, could be a source of support for its members. The participants were a professional development cohort of 10 women and 2 men from three middle schools and one elementary school, working in the same urban school district. Qualitative data collection occurred during one school year in the form of handwritten participant observation field notes from 16 two-hour cohort sessions when the group of novice teachers convened. The authors used Wenger's (1998) framework of *meaning*, *practice*, *identity*, and *community* as a structure for coding the data, noting that "the qualitative data sources allowed us to explore the complexities and nuances of situated social exchanges as they occurred in the context of a novice community of practice" (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011, p. 66).

Evaluation of the data revealed feelings of "cohortness" (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011, p. 66), as there was often an interactivity of two or more elements combined, which led to a reevaluation of the coding scheme. *Community*, as a code, was found to be pervasive throughout all the data and therefore was eliminated as an independent code. This was noteworthy in the study, as this points to the importance of community as a support for this novice group of

teachers: “Community was observed throughout and between the data – in the emotions captured, the temporal aspects of peer exchanges, the revelations of difficult ideas and vulnerabilities” (p. 72). Furthermore, due to the cohort composition of strictly novice teachers, there was an alteration of the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Analysis revealed that the teachers participated in the discourse, but not from the boundaries. Rather, they were full participants in the CoP, pointing to the question of whether the nonhierarchical nature of the group was important for this particular cohort of alternatively trained novice teachers. Further findings from the study noted the strong relationships among Wenger’s (1998) four components of *practice*, *meaning*, *identity* and *community*, which demonstrated the significance of the interactivity. For example, where as the singular code of practice provided a “snapshot” of the teachers’ conversations, the subsequent coding of “community, identity, and meaning provided a more richly textured album of resources for novice support” (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011, p. 72).

Cuddapah and Clayton’s (2011) study illustrated the importance of the *community* component in a CoP. Although the word appears in the name, it is essential to recognize its pervasive nature as “findings highlight the holistic central nature of this element as well as the necessity of its interactivity with the other elements” (p. 72). Another important element of this study was the application of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to a group of novice teachers. The “push[ing] of the boundaries” (p. 72) invited the novice alternatively trained teachers to be “full participants as their professional role had defined them” (p. 72), thus eliminating the need for a periphery. The action of altering legitimate peripheral participation in Cuddapah and Clayton’s (2011) study is influential as researchers are able to adapt this particular idea of full participation to novice teacher communities.

Another dialogic community that focused on the needs of novice teachers was explored by Masuda and Ebersole (2012). Examining a group of beginning teachers in a specifically constructed study group, Masuda and Ebersole's research centered on how to provide continued support for novice teachers. Recent graduates from the authors' university teacher education program, the participants had reached out to their former professors, Masuda and Ebersole, searching for help with the challenges they were facing in their classrooms. In addition, Masuda and Ebersole were in the process of examining the literacy curriculum in the area of writing and created a study group that specifically would target both the teaching of writing as well as provide "a safe and supportive space for dialogue to occur" (p. 161).

Meeting on a monthly basis for 2 years, the three public school elementary teachers and two professors established an agenda that included time for discussion on the current topical dilemmas in addition to conversations about the professional readings on teaching writing to students. Acting as facilitators, Masuda and Ebersole (2012) encouraged the teachers to share their struggles and acknowledged their contributions in order to have fluid, constructive discourse. During a typical meeting, the participants brought student writing to examine while the facilitators modeled a writing strategy and/or provided examples of model texts for the participants to explore.

Looking qualitatively at data from a specific 5-month period, Masuda and Ebersole (2012) wanted to "best capture the actual language used by these teacher participants" (p. 165). They chose to examine the transcripts of the study group, personal field notes, and teacher written reflections using discourse analysis. In addition, the study group sessions were videoed in order to provide the verbatim transcripts as well as to capture the "tone and use of language and meaning by the participants" (p. 165). They further noted the search for recurring discourse

while analyzing the data in order to answer their questions regarding the constraints of beginning teachers' pedagogy and the ways in which the study group supported them.

Masuda and Ebersole (2012) pinpointed three themes in the findings. One theme was the perspective of the beginning teachers regarding specific content of teaching writing at each of their grade levels. Although the novices initially focused on the mechanics of writing, the authors found that they began taking "small steps to try new ideas" (p. 168), particularly in the area of crafting writing for their students. Moreover, it was noted that the beginning teachers started to "think like writers" (p. 168), as the authors prompted the teachers to reflect on their own viewpoints of what a writer should focus on in their compositions.

Recurring challenges and dilemmas was the second theme found to be relevant in this study. This theme appeared more often than others as the beginning teachers frequently vented their frustrations "with more external influences such as outside pressure from peers, time constraints, and engaging in conflicting discourses" (Masuda & Ebersole, 2012, p. 169). As the most recent hires of their respective schools, the beginning teachers felt peer pressure from more veteran colleagues to know both the curriculum as well as the unwritten expectations of their grade level. Furthermore, the barrier of finding adequate time not only to complete the writing goals of the study group, but to teach all the required content was overwhelming. This led to tensions of conflicting discourses about institutional expectations and the type of teaching discussed in the study group.

The third theme stemmed from the connections and insights the teachers made during the study group sessions. Through collegial problem solving, the teachers worked together to deepen their knowledge of writing pedagogy as well as provide support for their dilemmas of practice. Through affirmations made by fellow participants, school colleagues, and their students, praise

was a favorable outcome for the participants, as one kindergarten teacher “knew she had made a difference in the lives of her students” (Masuda & Ebersole, 2012, p. 172). The final insight made by the authors noted the improvement in the beginning teachers’ pedagogy, as “the study group held them accountable to really focus on teaching practices, knowing that [we] would be sharing their successes and challenges every month” (p. 173).

Masuda and Ebersole (2012) concluded that it was essential for these beginning teachers to have a “time and space to talk about teaching and learning” (p. 174). Acknowledging the limitation of the small group of teachers, the study group served as starting place for these three beginning teachers to explore new inquiries in addition to providing a place for them “to pause, to connect, and to reflect upon their teaching amidst the flurry of demands and expectations placed upon them” (p. 174). The central role of community – or “cohortness” – was apparent in this study as it was in Cuddapah and Clayton’s (2011) study. Lastly, the authors postulated that this type of discourse-focused study group appeared to be a viable form of professional development for beginning teachers, as it provided structure combined with professional dialogue on topical issues.

Similar to the above study, engaging in ongoing dialogue was the undertaking of a group of novice teachers in a study by Mallous et al. (2012). It is of interest that this study originated from the same discourse community, *Reconnect and Recharge* (R&R), as the subject of this dissertation. Twenty-one K-12 teachers, all recent graduates of the same university and currently teaching in different schools, participated in a series of four R&R sessions during a single year where they met for four hours at a time to talk about dilemmas of practice they were experiencing in their school sites. This study focused on the content of the shared dilemmas discussed by the novice teachers, noting there was much discussion surrounding the topics of

curriculum dilemmas, student issues, teacher internal dilemmas as well as difficulties that arise from working with parents and colleagues. Among the findings from the study was that the teachers felt “the collaborative nature of [the group’s] problem-solving during the seminars seemed to improve their sense of self-efficacy and support” (Mallous, 2012, p. 22). The overall reactions to the community were positive, although the authors contended, “greater efforts to support newly inducted teachers are needed” (p. 22). In all studies examined here, novice teachers benefitted from participation in dialogic communities that reflected elements of communities of practice.

As described in the above studies, there are several favorable reasons for establishing discourse-focused groups in educational settings. Little (2002) and Palincsar et al. (1998) highlighted the importance of developing a collaborative community through discursive practices. A challenge identified is that of CoP participants engaging in critical conversation, something they may not have experienced prior to participation in the CoP (Daniel et al., 2013; Horn & Little, 2010). However, through the critical discourse, participation in the CoP can support change in teaching practice (Turner et al, 2011). Finally, several studies (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011; Mallous et al., 2012; Masuda & Ebersole, 2012) identify the importance of these sort of dialogic communities for novice teachers. By fostering collegial conversations that lead to changing classroom practice and professional growth, CoPs provided an avenue for thriving dialogic professional development.

Technology-mediated Professional Development

The evolution of the Internet from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 is creating subtle but profound changes in the ways people gather information as well as communicate with each other. The transformation of technology is driving changes in human behavior and their subsequent

interactions, how and where one acquires knowledge and, specific to this study, how teachers can find support via online professional development communities. The paradigms for providing professional development have evolved beyond traditional forms such as “drive-by workshops” (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009) to models that involve the use of interactive and collaborative forms of teacher development, in some of which teachers are able to contribute to the collective knowledge of the online community.

Communities for teacher support and learning are possible through online mediums, as online communities specifically made for teachers are now a growing trend (Schlager, Farooq, Fusco, Schank, & Dwyer, 2009). Moreover, policy recommendations have included the creation of online networks, especially for recent education graduates, as a way for them to stay connected to peers and teacher education faculty (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006). The types of online support for teachers range from more informal connections, such as email messages with colleagues and/or former professors (Babinski et al., 2001) to exchanging curriculum, videos, and other types of media via the Internet among colleagues. Additional broad-range support can be found in larger online communities, with teachers communicating with thousands of other teachers via discussion boards on education-related websites (Hur & Brush, 2009).

Online communities offer many benefits for participating teachers, with the varied characteristics of each online technology providing assistance in a specific way. Some attributes and advantages of online communities for practitioners include the sharing of multiple perspectives from many different school environments (Schlager & Fusco, 2003) or the convenience of accessing around-the-clock support and resources via the Internet from an assortment of electronic devices (Weller, 2007). Other benefits include flexible, individualized professional development opportunities (Zhao & Rop, 2001) or the opportunity to participate in

reflective discussions while benefiting from the contributions of multiple teachers from varied backgrounds (Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, & McCloskey, 2009). Further research has documented teachers who engaged in online communities noted experiencing emotional support as a result of participation, including feelings of camaraderie and the willingness to share their own emotions with others who understood their professional situations (Babinski et al, 2001; Gleaves & Walker, 2010; Hur & Brush, 2009).

In recent history, the use of online tools has allowed for new connections to be made for many professions, including educators. No longer are teachers restricted by a lack of helpful colleagues, insufficient resources, or long distances (Nussbaum-Beach & Hall, 2012). Technology, specifically Web 2.0 applications, enables teachers to locate support in a variety of ways. Of further note, many school systems are hiring teachers born into the millennial generation (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Technology applications and practices are predominantly intuitive for this particular group because computers and other digital devices permeated their own schooling (Baker-Doyle, 2011). In addition, technology is playing an increasingly greater role in how, when, and where novice teachers receive support. As technology transforms the ways people give and receive information, emerging technologies continue to reveal novel ways to support novice teachers (Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011).

Eliminating geographic barriers. In the past several years, technology has become ubiquitous as a form of communication. The motivations for teachers' participation in online communities vary depending on components such as individual goals, personal experiences and characteristics, relationships with others, and school culture. As illustrated in the following studies, online communities remove at least some of the barriers to traditional CoP's. One of the first studies examining a CoP used in an online format was by Moore and Barab in 2002. After

noting the difficulties in enacting a face-to-face CoP due to the “nature of schools and schooling” (p. 44), the opportunities afforded by new networking technologies, such as the Internet, were explored in order to learn novel ways to “bridge many of the geographic and time boundaries faced by today’s teachers” (p.45). Thus, a website for middle and high school math and science teachers was constructed, called the *Inquiry Learning Forum* (ILF). Restricted for use by only Indiana teachers, ILF was created to better understand how CoP members can be supported in an online context.

There were several bumps in the road, with respect to protecting student identity, allowing access to members, and—imperative to this study—providing social structures needed to adequately carry out the main components of a CoP, such as *domain*, *community*, and *practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Unfortunately, although active members participated in some features of the ILF, there was “not the kind of engaged, thought-provoking dialogue [the researchers] envisioned” (Moore & Barab, 2002, p. 47). The modifications the authors suggested included discussion points in order to provide an “entry point to discussions that can then lead to more in-depth dialogue” (p. 48). This rather sensible finding is key, as it informed my study in terms of providing prompts to my participants in order to generate rigorous and thought-provoking dialogue. Furthermore, an update on this particular study is described in the section on blended communities.

In the same way that Moore and Barab (2002) were interested eliminating geographic barriers, Duncan-Howell (2010) examined the benefits that could arise from relationships outside of the classroom. Ergo, Duncan-Howell conducted a quantitative online survey of 98 K–12 teachers to determine the nature of online community membership. This study aimed to provide insight into the professional development experiences, attitudes, and skills of the members of

three online professional teacher communities. Using 25 open and closed questions, the author compared the experiences of their online professional development with their face-to-face meetings.

Although the participants responded that they preferred face-to-face contact for professional development needs over an online platform, this was found to be in “direct contrast” to their answers for the question that “asked directly if participation in an online community could be regarded as a meaningful form of PD” (Duncan-Howell, 2010, p. 336). Furthermore, 77% of the respondents had been “exposed to new ideas and resources [in the online community] which they had used in their classrooms” (p. 337), and an overwhelming number of responses identified time as a significant advantage to using online teacher communities. When Duncan-Howell inquired if the respondents could recall a “discussion thread ... that had been particularly memorable” (p. 337), 85.72% answered positively. Those participants who responded in the affirmative noted the value of topics such as the discussion of particular behavior management strategies as well as the merits of different assessment tools.

In conclusion, Duncan-Howell (2010) ascertained the ability for online professional development to be a “rich source of professional learning” (p. 338). Another compelling benefit was the ability to engage with members of the teaching profession “outside of their workplace”, which the author felt “ensured a wider experience and helped create a sense of community” (p. 337). Similar to the Moore and Barab (2002) study, the results of this large-scale quantitative study strengthened the notion that online communities can create favorable conditions for online professional learning.

Mitigating feelings of isolation. Similar to the above studies on geographic barriers, Dalgarno and Colgan (2007) were interested in alleviating the isolation often felt during the first

years of teaching. Studying a group of 27 novice elementary mathematics teachers in a rural area who were connected to an “alternative teacher professional development” (p. 1051), Dalgarno and Colgan searched for the ways in which support was provided through an online site, qualitatively analyzing data collected via telephone interviews and focus groups. Through this Web 2.0 forum, the beginning teachers, now had “direct and immediate access to assistance about content and advice” (p. 1052) and felt they had “control over their learning” (p. 1059). The novice teachers credited the success of the online professional development to the connections made with other novice math teachers outside their rural community, while the authors noted the importance of providing teachers with quality, sustainable, reform-based resources through technology-facilitated learning.

Furthermore, Dalgarno and Colgan (2007) noted the switch from face-to-face workshops to technology-based professional development was critical in terms of supporting this group of alternatively-trained novice teachers who were often left without colleagues to collaborate with. Furthermore, the significance of the transition to newer alternative approaches was noted to be especially important for educational researchers and administrators serious about providing effective individualized support to novice teachers. This shift away from traditional models indicated to the authors that, “teachers profit more from the knowledge and insights they develop in their own ways through activity, discourse, reflection, inquiry, and applications” (p. 1054). Moreover, the findings contributed to the aforementioned policy recommendations by Liston and colleagues (2006) to create online networks for novice teachers in order to individualize their professional development as well as stay connected to colleagues with similar backgrounds, in this case, alternatively trained teachers.

Motivation for participating in online communities. Some scholars have examined why teachers participate in on-line communities. Searching for the incentives teachers have while participating in an electronic listserv, Hew and Hara (2007) examined an online CoP for literacy teachers with over 1200 members to find what motivated the participants to engage in this format. The data was collected through online observations and semi-structured telephone interviews with 20 participants. According to the authors, “Online observations were deemed suitable in this study because the recording of teachers’ activities and knowledge shared took place online and without face-to-face contacts between teachers and researchers” (p. 578), but they noted that a limitation of the study was the self-reported data from the interviews, in which participants perhaps “cast their motivations or barriers for sharing knowledge [on the website] in the best possible light” (p. 578). The researchers admitted while they made the objectives of the study clear to the participants, there remained the possibility that the responses skewed overly positive.

Using data analyzed through a content analysis approach, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine if relationships existed among the motivators, barriers, number of years of work experience, duration of membership on the listserv, and the frequency of knowledge shared. The results revealed only one statistically significant relationship, between number of years of employment and the frequency with which knowledge was shared. Qualitative coding, using a constant comparative method, was carried out to search for the types of activities that the teachers engaged in while on the website. There were nine types of reoccurring postings: request, appreciation, administrative, announcement, apology, clarification, compliment, empathy, and the sharing of knowledge which was the most frequent type of activity and is a common component of most CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

After analyzing the data from the varied sources, Hew and Hara (2007) identified four main motivators for why teachers share knowledge in online communities. The first was collectivism, in which teachers share knowledge in order to improve the welfare of community members. Closely connected was reciprocity, with the teachers sharing knowledge because they had previously received help and wanted to give back to others. Another finding was the need for their own personal gain, as teachers searched for what they required for their own teaching. The last motivator was altruism, as many teachers felt empathy for the struggles of members of their own profession, prompting the sharing of suggestions. Again, these motivations are all representative of attributes from CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The outcomes of this study demonstrate the utility of online technology in providing a suitable environment for engaging the activities of a CoP, although the examples provided were relatively simple; for example, one teacher noted in an interview that “when I share my knowledge, I usually get comments from other people, and we go back and forth in our discussions. It makes me think, stimulates my intellect and helps me gain a better understanding of the issue” (Hew & Hara, 2007, p. 585). Although the study is generally positive in its findings, more detail regarding the specific contributions by teachers to the online community would have provided an overall stronger impression of the impact of this online CoP on its participants.

Looking into the incentives for participating in the large online professional development community on Twitter was one of the purposes of Wesely (2013)’s study. This particular Twitter site had 500 “followers”, or individuals who read the online information. From this large group of microbloggers amassed a CoP comprised of world language teachers, examining the presence of the characteristics of *domain*, *community*, and *practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and how those characteristics were reflected in the teachers’ professional knowledge. Wesely (2013) used

convenience sampling to select nine participants to follow among the thousands participating on the microblog in a professional capacity. Data sources of participant observations, interviews, and online documents were qualitatively analyzed using a sociocultural perspective. In addition, the author employed the use of *netnography*, a type of online ethnography that uses participant-observational research based exclusively for online fieldwork. As described by Kozinets (2010), netnography “uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon” (p. 60). The cultural or communal phenomenon that Wesely (2013) examined was the Twitter-based CoP of world language teachers.

Participation in the Twitter-based CoP provided ample data in the form of tweets, which are messages of 140 characters or less, often marked with an identifier known as a “hashtag” (for example #langchat or #edchat). As Wesely explored the characteristics of the CoP, it was interesting to note the degree to which the participants embraced the more informal nature of this type of professional development. Case in point, the frequent postings of tweets such as “Twitter provides me the best PD [professional development]!” and “Teachers need the power to tell an admin [administrator] to go fly a kite when an admin [administrator] dumps his/her agenda on them!” (Wesely, 2013, p. 311). Wesely suggested tweets, such those listed above, allowed the community to be more supportive and friendly, leading to a more knowledgeable CoP.

In regards to the three well-established characteristics of CoPs, the aspect of shared *domain* was clearly evident in this study. First, every member of the CoP was highly vested in teaching world languages as well as identified as being an expert in the field (Wesely, 2013, p. 311). It was noted that the level of discourse was “clearly one of experienced, connected WL [world language] educators” (p. 312) as the author noted many of the interactions frequently

referred to specific classroom practices and links to online curricula. Furthermore, the author noted a second domain of technological acumen among the members, as the members stated in interviews that they were “exceptionally interested in technology due to personal interest and inclination” (p. 312). The final domain, self-identified by the participants, was their view of themselves as learners. Wesely was interested in the findings regarding learning in online CoP in order to challenge the critique that “online educational contexts are well suited for supporting knowledge sharing, but that they do not actually support knowledge learning” (p. 306-7). The outcome of a domain of learning can be seen throughout the data; for example one teacher noted, “For me, a lot of [being in the Twitter community] is about just the learning, and a lot of it is about the lessons as well, seeing the other WL [world language] educators sharing ideas” (p. 312).

In terms of the characteristic of *community*, Lave and Wenger (1991) specified that members must engage in joint activities and discussions as well as share information. Wesely (2013) felt this was achieved through this online CoP on a basic level, as this group communicated purely through its joint discussions via tweets. Some members noted prior to joining this CoP that isolation was prevalent in their jobs; becoming a member of this CoP led to a “transformation from working in isolation to finding a community” (p. 312). This evidence of community is striking in an interview given by a member who described being “in a little cave” prior to joining the CoP, then through Twitter finding a “community of people that reinforce and help me everyday look forward to work, and look forward to teaching” (p. 312).

The attribute of *practice* was essential to this CoP as it involved sustained interactions, the sharing of ideas among members and contributions to a knowledge base. This characteristic could be seen in the lengthy collaborations between members via scheduled webcam meetings,

which demonstrated how the individuals collaborated on projects as well as sustained frequent dialogue and debate. Learning, in terms of practice, was also visible, as the process of “indexing, reorganizing, explaining, and reframing resources [for self and others] was a key activity” (p. 314) in terms of co-constructing knowledge. The aggregate of the evidence found among the three characteristics demonstrated the collaborative nature of a purely online community and further justified the use of technology as a viable means for valuable professional development.

As the studies above demonstrate, the benefits of technology-based professional development reach far beyond the school walls, as the advantage of eliminating the geographic barriers was considered to be a salient feature (Duncan-Howell, 2010; Moore & Barab, 2002) as well as the ability to mitigate feelings of isolation for teachers (Dalgarno & Colgan, 2007). Furthermore, there are many motivating factors for teachers to participate in online communities (Hew & Hara, 2007; Wesely, 2013). As the technology for communication continues to evolve and expand, teachers will have the ability to transform their teaching by engaging in innovative technology-based professional development.

Blended Communities for Professional Development

Although the popular idiom *having the best of both worlds* might seem cursory when considering the professional development needs of teachers, perhaps it is a fitting way to begin to contemplate the advantages of blended communities. Blended Communities of Practice can be defined as communities of learners using more than one tool to build knowledge, such as the use of technology coupled with face-to-face discussion (Bonk & Graham, 2012). Specific to blended CoPs, different communication modalities (i.e., face-to-face and online) are combined in order to improve or amplify the collaborative learning as well as the knowledge and community building – amplifying and improving the *domain*, *community* and *practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Research on blended professional development communities, while not extensive, does provide some insight that informs this study.

Advantages of blended communities. Interested in the benefits that can arise from blended communities, DeWert, Babinski, and Jones (2003) and Babinski, Jones and DeWert (2001) described the outcomes of the Lighthouse Project, a blended support community for novice teachers. The 24 participants were all associated with the same university and included 12 first-year teachers (6 elementary, 5 middle school, 1 high school), 4 veteran mentor teachers, and 8 university faculty members. Among the goals of the project were to “(a) provide the opportunity for beginning teachers to engage in professional problem solving with colleagues and mentors during their first year of teaching, (b) enable beginning teachers to work through their concerns and fears in a ‘safe’ (i.e. non-evaluative) environment, and (c) reduce the isolation beginning teachers experience” (Babinski et al., 2001, p. 53). Members participated in an initial face-to-face orientation, in order to review the structured approach for discussing problem solving in an online format as well as to receive laptops and information on accessing technical assistance. Over the next 6 months, the participants communicated asynchronously via a private email listserv, moving to a threaded discussion forum via the Internet for the final 6 weeks of the study. This change provided a more manageable format for reading complex discussions.

Data analysis included both qualitative methods (content analysis of online communication) as well as quantitative analyses regarding the number of messages and responses posted by the members serving various positions within the online community. Although there was a wide range of topics discussed online, the quantitative data demonstrated all group members had a high percentage of messages coded with “fostering a sense of community”. This is evidence of support, as everyone in the group provided reassurance and

help during the study. Upon reviewing the qualitative data, the authors noted that the novice teachers were more likely to respond with a “personal message” whereas the faculty members were more likely to “share knowledge” and “offer advice”. Despite the fact that one of the intentions of the group was for the more experienced members to encourage the novice teachers to use the problem-solving model and engage in reflection, it is not surprising that the faculty members would counsel the novice teachers and provide guidance to them.

Dewert et al. (2003) reported that the Lighthouse Project demonstrated several positive outcomes for the novice teachers. They include increased emotional support, decreased feelings of isolation, increased confidence as teachers, increased enthusiasm for work, increased reflection, and improved problem-solving skills. There is evidence of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for this study as well, as the beginning teachers became more active members of the group as time went on. While the authors stated it was a successful study, they noted its limitations was due to a small, homogeneous sample size as well as no outside evaluation of the project.

Obstacles to blended communities. Similar to the above studies, the nature of the interactions between group members in a blended community of practice played a role in Matzat’s (2010) study. But instead of the looking into the benefits, Matzat was interested in reducing the problems of anti-sociable behavior in online communities. Researching teachers who were using a combination of online and face-to-face interactions, Matzat searched for ways to lessen the typical problems seen in online communities, such as the lack of trust between members, lack of stable membership, and “free rider” behavior, which is the “tendency of members to withhold information and let others incur contribution costs” (p. 3). In order to identify these barriers, Matzat quantitatively analyzed survey data from 26 online communities

that were part of a larger online organization for teachers. Furthermore, Matzat noted that this study contributed to two strands of research. The first addition is in *how* offline relations affect online interactions. Secondly, his research strengthens the idea that complete integration of the entire community is not essential: “a mixture of virtual and real-life interaction between some members is enough to reduce problems of sociability faced by the whole community, making a complete integration unnecessary” (p. 2).

Matzat (2010) focused on the “embeddedness” of the blended communities (p. 4), recognizing that the combination of online and face-to-face interactions was vital to the success of the overall community. Yet, a prevalent problem was “free riding”, which is “the tendency of members to withhold information and let others incur contribution costs” (p. 3). Although “a useful online discussion is a collective good for the whole [community]”, Matzat acknowledged that a contribution to the community, whether face-to-face or online, can be “costly” (p. 3) and many participants will remain on the sidelines rather than engage in the conversation. Matzat noted that if the proclivity to free ride was too high, it impacted the entire community and thus created a paucity of benefits for all participants.

Six dependent variables were examined in the study. The first three variables used a Likert scale and focused on the perceived intensity of the free-riding problem, membership fluctuation, and problems of trust. The members’ willingness to contribute to the collective good of the community as well as their willingness to place trust scored on a Likert scale as well. The last variable pertained to self-reported behaviors regarding past contributions to the community. In addition, independent variables were measured to research the embeddedness of the community. These included demographics of the members of the community, years of digital experience, and digital literacy. Matzat (2010) indicated that the average member had subscribed

to the community for 7 to 12 months, used the community 1 day per week, and was “not very active in the community” (p. 11).

The quantitative analysis of the blended community indicated fewer problems of trust and free-riding behaviors than in purely online communities. Furthermore, Matzat (2010) theorized, “even those who have no offline [face-to-face] relations are affected by a community’s high degree of embeddedness in offline [face-to-face] networks” (p. 16). Ergo, everyone benefits from the combination of face-to-face and online communication, whether a participator or not. Moreover, Matzat concluded that the findings supported the need for embedded communities, as there are advantages to a blended community, especially in respect to sociability due to the “higher density” of opportunities for socialization (p. 18).

Similar to Matzat’s study, Barab and colleagues (2004) recognized some obstacles to the creation of a blended community. Beginning the study with a strictly online format, eventually evolving into a blended community, this study focused on preservice and inservice math and science teachers who were engaged in Inquiry Learning Forum (ILF). ILF was initially a purely online community intended for the sharing of inquiry-based pedagogical practices, mentioned previously in the technology section of this paper. In the first study, the researchers had been interested in the creation of an online CoP in which the value of the participants’ sharing their practice and manually posting dialogue exceeded the costs of participation in terms of time, technology access, and the unease felt when letting others view one’s teaching. Over the longitudinal study, data was collected qualitatively through field notes, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and member checks in order to gain knowledge in regards to the teachers’ perspectives of ILF. The study moved through several iterations during the 2-year period, from a strictly online CoP to a blended CoP, as the researchers realized that “building

community implies much more than having a [well-designed] website” (p. 41), as it necessitates human connections within the technological aspects.

The outcomes of Barab et al. (2004) were not as expected. Although the results were presumed to be an “electronic structure that would become a tool for teachers through which they would develop a deeper understanding of inquiry-based teaching and become a member of a community” (p. 41), this was not the authors’ final impression from the study. Rather, the authors noted it was less about the “good design” and the “notions of usability”, and more about the social nature of the electronic medium, switching the emphasis from “human-computer interactions to human-human interactions” (p. 41). Another important conclusion was the shift from thinking about the technology as a social network rather than simply an electronic forum. This movement in thinking transpired as the data indicated that the teachers were “not simply critiquing videos or conversing with colleagues but were critiquing other teachers in a permanent, semi-public forum” (p. 41), leading the researchers to organize face-to-face workshops and send direct emails in order to model feedback for the teachers, thus changing this online community into a blended community. Furthermore, noting that the building of a community is not something that can be done by outsiders, Barab et al. (2004) asserted, “Communities of Practice are organic systems that emerge through interactions among community members, not because some designer made it so” (p. 42).

Interactions within the blended community. The following studies illustrate the potential for cooperative participation in blended communities. Although distance learning is not typically considered a blended community, Conrad (2005) employed the notion of *community* in this qualitative study of a cohort of graduate students working in both online and face-to-face situations. Different from the above studies due to graduate students being participants, this

study of 18 group members was focused on the building of community and the ways in which community-like behaviors were enacted. Conrad noted the importance of the blended aspects of this community. The opportunities for the student to meet face-to-face enhanced the online communications, and the converse was also true, as “each facilitated a greater ease in the other medium” (p. 9). The union of these two mediums demonstrated the compelling nature of blended communities, as the members conveyed that the “face-to-face encounters encouraged a reciprocally valued relationship: seeing and meeting each other ... was a contributing factor to the health of [the] online community” (p. 18).

Interested in the participants’ perceptions of community, Conrad (2005) specifically inquired what community meant to the participants, both at the beginning and the end of the study. Prior to the first face-to-face communication, the words “group, technology, and exchange [of information]” were most notable; this pointed to the notion of community being “understood in terms of purpose and time-and-place and represented by a online, technological place” (p. 6). By the second inquiry, after collaborating in a blended manner for over 8 months, the participants noted an emphasis on relationships, interconnectedness, and familiarization with fellow members. Moreover, support was mentioned by over half the participants: the “notion of working together for a common purpose was explicitly stated in two-thirds of the responses” (p. 7). At the conclusion of the study, the blended environment was seen to provide an “enormous surge of connectedness and satisfaction” for this distance-learning community (p. 9).

The transition of novice teachers from *learning to teach* to *teaching to learn* is consequential for several reasons (Herrington, Herrington, Kervin, & Ferry, 2006). Prior to entering their careers, preservice teachers are surrounded by a supportive preprofessional community, often made up of peers and professors. The sudden change after graduation, possibly

in many contexts (such as geographically, culturally, socially, and psychologically), can be overwhelming. Thus, it is a necessity for schools to support novice teachers in the most advantageous manner possible, conceivably in blended CoPs. Conrad (2005) gracefully noted a blended community provides:

a general sense of connection, belonging, and comfort that develops over time among the members of a group ... who share purpose or commitment to a common goal. The creation of community simulates for learners the comforts of home, providing a safe climate, an atmosphere of trust and respect, an invitation for intellectual exchange, and a gathering place for like-minded individuals who are sharing a journey that includes similar activities, purpose, and goals.” (p. 2)

Although this utopian view of a community might seem outlandish, it incorporates the concrete purposes of a CoP, which are to foster a shared domain, community, and practice among its members (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Likewise interested in the interaction within blended communities, Cesarini, Martini, and Mancini (2011) examined a CoP comprised of 34 novice and experienced teachers, 5 researchers, and 6 university students. The focus of the international study aimed at developing and testing innovative pedagogical models and technologies for collaborative knowledge building. *Innovative Technologies for Collaborative Learning* (ITCOLE) tested and disseminated the new pedagogical models and technologies to four European countries. This particular article focused on the case study from Italy, using discourse analysis methods to analyze data from both the online and face-to-face discussions. The participants in the study initially met for a face-to-face meeting, met online for 3 months, then engaged in a final face-to-face focus group session.

While examining the development of this CoP, Cesarini et al. (2011) focused on the different ways the members of the group would participate, with a specific interest in the process of how different roles were established within the CoP and the distinct ways in which the members would participate online and face-to-face. The authors found that the novice teachers

were initially silent during the face-to-face sessions and remained more peripheral throughout the online sessions, relying on others to participate. Deeming this as “active listening” (p. 644), the authors explained the “teachers were aware of their different roles” (p. 645), as the expert colleagues were more adept to participate due to their knowledge. This directly aligns with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation, as the novice teachers were participating from the periphery. The blended aspect of the CoP was of assistance to the novice teachers, as they recognized the strengths they brought to the community and became “more competent partners” through the blended interactions (p. 644).

The overall message from the sum of the literature leads to an understanding of the rich potential of blended CoPs for novice teachers. Examining the interaction in blended communities, scholars (Cesarini et al., 2011; Conrad 2005) remind us that this type of professional development is not only essential for teacher professional growth, but ultimately for the academic growth of the students in the classrooms of these teachers. Providing professional development opportunities that incorporate technology enables teachers to make decisions about their own learning based on their needs and schedules, one the many advantages of blended CoPs (Babinski et al., 2001; Dewert et al., 2003) but it is important to remember the challenges that can arise, including the free-riding and inappropriate comments in online contexts (Barab et al., 2004; Matzat, 2010). My study helps extend research on blended CoPs by investigating the nature of blended CoPs for novice teachers, seeking to understand ultimately what attributes are needed to develop successful blended CoPs.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMINING TWO BLENDED COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to explore the addition of an online Web 2.0 technology component to *Reconnect and Recharge* (R&R), an established community of practice (CoP), to determine the effect of blended CoPs on novice teacher learning. As noted in previous chapters, R&R fulfills the attributes of a CoP as it provides participants an opportunity to engage in a joint enterprise of discourse around problems of practice. Furthermore, mutual engagement among R&R participants is enhanced by the shared repertoires of novice teaching in elementary school settings. The following specific questions guided this study:

1. What is the nature of novice elementary school teachers' discourse in a blended CoP?
 - a. What does a face-to-face community look like?
 - b. What does an online community look like?
 - c. What is the content of the discussions in the face-to-face and online CoPs?
 - d. What are the differences between face-to-face and online interactions for the individual participants?
 - e. How do the interactions in both environments impact each other and the participants' overall experiences?

The findings contribute to the broader discussion on the integration and impact of Web 2.0 technology into novice teacher support systems.

Research Design

As the research interests of this study revolved around the interactions of a group of

novice elementary school teachers communicating in a blended community of practice, qualitative research was a viable methodology. Qualitative research involves an interpretative approach to its subject matter. As Creswell (1998) noted, qualitative research occurs "in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words ... analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (p. 14). This study focused on analyzing the social interactions of its participants to determine the impact of the blended CoP. Thus qualitative research was most appropriate for this exploration of how social experiences are created and given meaning by participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 1991).

Recruitment

According to Morse (2007), qualitative sampling should follow three guidelines. First, sampling should target focus groups and interviews to ascertain useful data. Second, sampling should seek to locate top-notch participants. And third, sampling should seek to be efficient. Following these guidelines, I used a purposive sampling method to recruit participants from the existing R&R communities since this was an already established CoP but one that was only conducted as a face-to-face model.

All participants were alumni of a large, southeastern university in the United States and were in their 1st to 5th year of teaching at the time of the study. Novice teachers in the elementary (K–5) teacher groups from R&R were invited to participate in the study. Recruitment was restricted to the elementary groups, given my experience of facilitating previous elementary R&R groups and my own experience as an elementary teacher. There were six participants in the first iteration and five in the second iteration. Moreover, although all the participants in the study were in their first 5 years of teaching, there were both “newcomers” (first-time members of

R&R) and “old-timers” (those who had participated in R&R in previous years) in the group, which Lave and Wenger (1991) noted is essential for a CoP due to the significance of legitimate peripheral participation.

In both iterations of the study, recruitment occurred through emails to the participants via the R&R database. Each teacher who participated in the study agreed to commit to continue attending both the face-to-face discourse community sessions and become a participant in the online community. Each of the online communities used a password-protected website with asynchronous capabilities that allowed participants to interact in between the face-to-face sessions, primarily through the use of discussion threads.

The first iteration of this study began in March 2014, coinciding with the third face-to-face session of R&R. It concluded in June 2014 after the fourth and final face-to-face session for this CoP. Between the third and fourth face-to-face sessions, the six participants engaged in an online CoP via a moodle-style platform. Protocol for online participation mimicked the protocol for the R&R sessions due to participants’ familiarity with that format. This included some initial responding to prompts about typically occurring dilemmas for novice teachers as well as presenting their own dilemmas of practice.

The first iteration informed the second iteration of the study, which occurred from November 2014 – the first face-to-face session – to January 2015, the second face-to-face session. The second iteration had four returning participants from the first iteration, with one new participant who was also new to R&R. In addition to a change in the participants, the online platform switched to Facebook, a popular social media website. I made this shift as a result of feedback from iteration one. Again, the procedures for online participation resembled the protocol for the R&R sessions as much as possible. This included posting and discussing

dilemmas, resources, and articles on the private website.

Role of the Researcher

This study was conducted in such a way as to consider the role that the researcher played in the qualitative data process. Rather than viewing the researcher as an unemotional, impartial observer with no preconceptions, prejudices, or assumptions about the subject matter, this study accepted that the researcher is human and, therefore, is subject to the circumstance that all perceptions of the world come with interpretations. This acknowledgement is neither new nor distinct to this study. In the words of Birks and Mills (2011), “researchers are a sum of all they have experienced” (p. 11). As a result, researchers should endeavor to become aware of their own positionality in relation to their observations. Seeing that I was the facilitator of both the face-to-face discourse sessions as well as the coordinator of the online CoP websites, I was acquainted with the participants and was a contributing member of the CoP in terms of providing content at times for the ongoing dialogue in both formats. Thus, I realize that I played a central part in the study, the representation of data, and the analysis of findings. Therefore my own experience as teacher is germane to the study.

As a former elementary school teacher for 14 years in public schools, I am strongly connected to the particular issues that elementary school teachers face and have a keen interest in the ways this specific group of teachers can be supported in their careers. When I first began teaching in the mid-1990s, I found myself struggling through many of the same types of dilemmas that the participants faced during this study. It was through the support of a countywide novice teacher mentoring program, as well as three colleagues in particular, which enabled me to address my own dilemmas of practice. During the novice teacher meetings, there was typically a speaker who would provide information on district policies and procedures then

the conversational floor would transition to an open forum for the teachers to discuss topics of interest – which often led to discourse around the typical dilemmas for novice teachers. It was through these conversations that I was able to elucidate many of my professional struggles, and continue on with my career as a classroom teacher. In many ways, this context provided a sort of CoP for me and my fellow novice teachers.

Since that time, I have been a mentor teacher, a cooperating teacher for pre-service teachers and a university supervisor. Thus I have worked for over 10 years with novice teachers and recognize distinct issues that are connected to the job, including classroom management, parental communication, lesson-planning, and working with veteran teachers. These issues—including the challenges of being a new teacher in a large public school system—are not far removed from those I experienced. The problems of practice the participants shared with their fellow community members are familiar to me. In many ways, these predominantly white, middle class, female teachers are me. Thus I had to immerse myself in the data so as not to make assumptions about what I thought I should be seeing based on my own experiences.

Another consideration for me as I conducted the research and analysis was my participation in several online contexts. I believe in the potential of on-line communities as sites for learning. During my teaching, I was a member of several online communities focused on teachers and pedagogy, and I actively participated in contributing opinions and resources. In addition, I was a participant in online courses and engaged in discussion via discussion boards and video chat platforms. My experiences in Web 2.0 contexts influenced this study due to the positive impact I believed it could have on this particular community of practice of novice teachers. Thus I had to bring a critical eye to bear on the data I collected from the on-line component of this work. I brought this knowledge of both my online experience as well as my

extensive experience as an elementary school teacher and mentor to my data collection and analysis. Again, I had to look carefully at what the data was telling me rather than impose my judgments on the data based on my prior experience.

Participants

As mentioned previously, all the participants were alumni from the same university and graduates of the education program. The participants worked as teachers in the same state and were within driving distance of the site for the face-to-face sessions. The 13 participants were all female and within an age range of 22-32. In addition, 12 women were White and one woman was Black. During the first iteration, there were five teachers in their first year of teaching, two in their second year, three in their third year, and one each in their fourth and fifth years. During the second iteration, there was one teacher in her first year, one in her second year, two in their third year, and one teacher in her fifth year. There were six participants who participated in all three sessions of the first iteration and five participants in all three of the second iteration. See Table 1 for specific information on grade level and years of teaching for all 12 participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Number of years taught	Grade level	Ethnicity	Gender
Ava	1	Pre-K	White	F
Dove	2	Fifth	White	F
Evelyn	1	Pre-K	White	F
Finch	3	K	White	F
Lark	1	ESL K-5	White	F
Linnet	1	ESL K-5	White	F
Paloma	4	Second	White	F
Phoebe	2	Third	White	F
Raven	5	First	White	F
Robin	3	Third	Black	F
Sparrow	1	ESL K-5	White	F
Wren	3	First	White	F

Data Collection

I gathered three forms of data for this study: audiotapes of face-to-face discourse sessions that I then transcribed, transcripts of the online community, and two semi-structured individual interviews with each participant, one prior to the study's initial face-to-face session and one after the study's second face-to-face session. As it was an established routine for this particular group of novice teachers, the use of discussion groups was a straightforward method of collecting data. In addition, it was customary to audiotape the sessions prior to the start of this study for other research studies associated with R&R. Furthermore, interviews served as an accessible method for gathering needed member checking from the individuals as well as gaining their perspectives on the study.

Consistent with the nature of qualitative research, I was the predominant instrument in the study (Mertens, 2010). I was the discussion leader/facilitator for the face-to-face sessions and online components of the project. As facilitator, my role was to monitor the group's conversations to ensure participants stayed on task, but the flow and nature of conversations were driven by the participants themselves. During a typical discussion group, I would ask probing questions or encourage further dialogue when there was a lull or gap in the conversation, with my contributions to the dialogue accounting for an average of 6% of the total face-to-face conversations and 16% of written content for the online forum. Further discussion of my positionality is described below, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted that it is "not possible to be completely free of bias" (p. 97). Thus my positionality inevitably influenced all aspects of the study.

Face-to-Face Communities of Practice

The face-to-face discourse communities served as the beginning and ending points of both iterations of the study. Each face-to-face session was audio-recorded, and I then transcribed these discussions. In total, 490 pages of transcription resulted from these face-to-face discussions. Participants engaged in conversations with one another for approximately 1 to 2 hours at a time while sitting in a circle around a table. The purpose of observing and audio-recording the discourse communities was to collect information regarding the content of discussion as well as other features of the participants' discourse. Transcription therefore included such features as notable pauses, discourse markers, and repetition.

Online Communities of Practice

The written posts of the online CoP served as a second data source. The purpose of the online CoP was in part to provide an opportunity for the participants to continue talking beyond the face-to-face sessions. The password-protected websites used discussion threads as the means for interaction. For the first iteration, a moodle was used as a platform for the online community. I chose a moodle because I could design it especially for this CoP, with separate webpages created for each type of discussion thread. There was a home page with an introduction to the moodle, with a link to the *forum* embedded within that page. This was a place for participants to post any dilemmas, ask for and give advice, give updates, or pose questions to the group. The moodle provided one way to post and one way to respond: on the forum. There were no external outlets for other types of communication or avenues to learn more about fellow participants. For the second iteration, due to participant frustration with the moodle platform, I chose to use Facebook, a popular online social media platform. Serendipitously, all the participants were already members of Facebook. As a member of Facebook, the participants were able to connect

with one another in a private group page, with access only available by invitation by me. Our Facebook page consisted of a main webpage where participants could post new dilemmas and/or scroll through in order to respond to one another. Furthermore, the nature of Facebook allowed the participants to see other aspects of their lives beyond the posting of the dilemmas: there were photos, posting of articles on myriad of subjects beyond teaching, and additional ways to engage with one another via “liking” posts or sending private messages. Facebook invited the participants to know more of the whole person beyond their novice teacher persona. Despite these differences in the platforms, the purpose of the website remained the same in both iterations: to provide a digital space for participants to participate in a CoP. Although I was a participant in both websites, my intent was to provide points for discussion, then step back to allow the participants to engage in online dialogue with fellow CoP members. I aimed to serve a similar role in the online and face-to-face contexts. As discussed in the next chapter, this task proved challenging at times.

I analyzed all written content posted on the websites for topics that were most salient to the participants as well as how the participants engaged in interactions using the online format. . In total, 64 pages of transcription resulted from the online forum. The online discussion threads also provided information about individual CoP members’ participation, including how often they participated as well as the nature of their participation. In addition, I took field notes on a weekly basis, making note of both participation on the website as well as the nature and topics of conversation.

Interviews

Since a primary concern of the study was to understand how participants experienced the blended CoP, I used semi-structured in-depth interviews as a critical piece of data. According to

the literature addressed in Chapter 2, in order to build a productive CoP, members must know how to deal with human differences, emotionally and physically support one another, and share expertise and resources (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For this purpose, interviews with each participant were vital to understanding the levels of support each member felt—or did not feel—through the process, depending on the context. The interviews allowed me to better understand the experience from each participant’s perspective. Rubin and Rubin (1995) stated,

All qualitative interviews share three pivotal characteristics that distinguish them from other forms of data gathering in social and political research. First, qualitative interviews are modifications or extensions of ordinary conversations, but with important distinctions. Second, qualitative interviewers are more interested in the understanding, knowledge, and insights of the interviewees than in categorizing people or events in terms of academic theories. Third, the content of the interview, as well as the flow and choice of topics, changes to match what the individual interviewee knows and feels. (p. 6)

Interviewing my participants allowed me to engage in more informal conversations around the participants’ experiences. In addition, I asked follow-up questions based on their responses to my prepared protocol and engaged in modified member checking based on observations from my analysis of face-to-face and online discussions (Mertens, 2010). With permission, I audio-recorded and transcribed each interview.

As a method of data collection, interviews provide “the opportunity to learn what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see” as well as a way to ascertain “opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward some topic” (Glesne, 2011, p. 104). The interviews were intended to elicit thoughtful reflection from the novice teachers on their participation in the CoP as well as their overall opinions on the blended community, among other questions. Using the questions provided in Appendix A as a guide for both iterations, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant; one prior to the initiation of the blended community and one at the end of the study period.

Initial interviews. At the beginning of each study, I conducted an initial interview with each participant to gain a sense of the teachers' backgrounds as well as learn more about their perspectives on how R&R works or might work as a community of practice. Additionally, I wanted to confirm with each participant that they were comfortable with technology and the concept of sharing dilemmas in an online format. Furthermore, it was also an opportunity to ensure that each participant had successfully gained access to the password-protected website in addition to answering any questions about the study.

Post interviews. In the post-interviews, I hoped to ascertain more about how the teachers viewed their own participation in both the face-to-face and the online components of the study as well as their opinions on the concept of the blended community. As seen in Appendix A, during the first iteration post-interview, I asked specifically about any changes they would make to the study. These answers ultimately helped shape the second iteration of the study. During the post-interview for the extended study, I probed about the detailed actions of the participants, asking more specifically about the amount of time spent in the online community for example (see Appendix A). In addition, there were overall revisions made in the phrasing of the questions in order to encourage more reflection from the participants.

Data Analysis

Data, including transcripts from face-to-face sessions, online sessions, and interviews, was analyzed for evidence of themes to determine, among other things, the topics of online vs. face-to-face discussions. Following thematic analysis, I engaged in close discourse analysis (Gee, 2005; Tannen, 2007) to examine participation frameworks within the CoPs.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis concerns the investigation of language-in-use and focuses on

analyzing talk and text in context. I primarily drew from the research work of Tannen (1993, 2005, 2007), who used sociolinguistics to identify patterns in the conversations of small groups of individuals. Tannen identified and discussed conversational styles that occurred within these groups. In my case, I was looking to identify patterns of conversation occurring within a closed group of novice teachers and specifically at “language beyond the sentence” (Tannen, 2007, p. 5). In other words, I focused on the ways that participants used language with one another to determine how individuals functioned within the group as well as how the group functioned as a whole. Close exploration of discourse patterns provided important information to understand what unfolded in the CoPs.

My familiarity with these particular teachers’ cultural speech patterns as well as the terminology used in their particular school contexts was useful for deciding what data were representative to help answer the research questions. Furthermore, analysis was a continuous and recursive process. I reviewed audiotapes, re-read transcripts, and looked for words or phrases that reflected the nature of the blended community. I noted these on the transcripts so I could refer back to them during later readings.

The process of analysis began with the transcription of the discussion groups and interviews with the participants. While transcribing, general reading allowed me to make notes while identifying “potentially interesting phenomenon in the data” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 94). As described below, two face-to-face sessions per study were transcribed to record what was spoken, including pauses, overlapping speech, laughter, and repeated words or phrases. The transcripts also provided a written representation of who spoke during the sessions as well as the content of their utterances. The content recorded on the online community website also served as written documentation used for the analysis. After highlighting for specific codes, I assembled

the codes into a spreadsheet so I could sort by codes and look for informative patterns.

The first analysis of the transcripts focused on the content of the discussions, searching for themes among the conversations. See Appendix B for the list of specific themes. I particularly noted the use of content themes found in former studies of R&R (Mallous et al., 2012) to ascertain if there were similarities in the content, of which there were several. Next, I developed descriptive coding for identified areas of interest. For some of the coding categories, quantification was used to document the size of the collection of a particular phenomenon. It should be noted that quantification of the data was limited, as it did not describe why or how participants were orienting their talk during the conversation (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1988). However, the quantification became a useful tool to help identify recurrent patterns within the talk.

After the analysis of the content, I relied on practices within discourse analysis that attend to not only what talk is about, but also how talk was formed among the group members. Based on intensive discourse analysis whereby researchers examine all aspects of the discourse, I transcribed my data accordingly: making note of every pause, change in tone, each discourse marker, and all moments of laughter, all transcription markers that have been utilized by other analysts previously to examine conversational coherence (Schiffren, 1987; Schiffren, 2001; Tannen, 1985; Glenn, 2003).

There were particular language patterns that emerged from the data such as the frequent use of discourse markers in the participants' speech. Therefore the next stage of analysis involved coding for utterances such as *you know*, *so*, *like*, *um*, and *yeah*. In addition, I listened to the audiotapes while reading the transcripts, searching for any changes in participants' tone which might indicate a shift in the community and/or participation. Moreover, I marked the

frequent appearance of laughter, as that became particularly evident as I reviewed the face-to-face transcripts. What became additionally evident with further review of the data was that there were patterns of repetition within speaker turns as well as between speaker turns. As Tannen (2007) explained, there are several functions for repetition in conversation, one being how “it provides a resource to keep talk going, where talk itself is a show of involvement, of willingness to interact” (p. 61). Thus I coded for both when the individual participant repeated a single word or a phrase within her own speaking turn as well as when participants would echo the same dialogue spoken by a fellow participant.

After this second round of analysis, I wrote a second analytical memo on repetition, discourse markers, and laughter and examined the findings. I talked through my theoretical, analytical, and methodological observations with another researcher with expertise in discourse analysis for clarity. For the second iteration of the study, I followed the same process as above: first looking at content, next applying the same techniques from discourse analysis, then sharing initial analysis with a fellow researcher. As will be shown in Chapter Four, there were similar patterns across the multiple transcripts.

The next step in coding accounted for the specific characteristics of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of Communities of Practice. I reread the transcripts looking for the features of *joint enterprise*, *mutual engagement*, and *shared repertoire*. For the first iteration, there were 75 examples of *joint enterprise*, 216 examples of *mutual engagement*, and 58 examples of *shared repertoire*. For the second iteration, there were 86 examples of *joint enterprise*, 154 examples of *mutual engagement*, and 39 examples of *shared repertoire*. Refer to Appendices E, F, and G for examples from the study.

The final stage of coding concentrated on the specific contributions of individual

participants. Writing a memo for each participant, I noted the number of times each participant spoke as well as the overall percentage of contribution for each face-to-face session and the online community. Through comparing these participation levels across the novice teachers in both the face-to-face and the online sessions, I was able to describe the overall participation practices for each individual and determine how these practices helped manage the conversational floor. Furthermore, I analyzed the discourse of each participant's contributions individually, then examined across their fellow participants to identify similarities and differences.

Credibility

In order to establish credibility, I employed triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Glesne, 2011) across the sources of data (face-to-face transcripts, online transcripts, and interviews) when determining findings. As Creswell and Miller (2000) explained, "triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). Through studying multiple participants and multiple sources of data from each participant, I identified corroborating evidence across multiple sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

I also solicited member checks (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Mertens, 2010) from the participants during the final interviews. For my study, member checking involved "taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). As Creswell and Miller advised, throughout the member-checking process I asked if the themes and categories "make sense, whether they are developed with sufficient evidence, and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate" (p.

127). This safeguarded against my imposing a framework upon participants and allowed for transparency in their intentions and participation in the COP.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

For this study, trustworthiness was ensured through my comprehensive involvement in both the face-to-face and the online CoPs, the use of member checking, as well as consideration made due to my subjectivity throughout the progression of this study. I spent time reflecting on field notes and analytic memos, working to withhold my own perspectives on novice teacher communities. I also considered how my own assumptions, ideology, and cultural position (Glesne, 2011) might be reflected in my notes. My assumptions included opinions on what I considered to be supportive actions as well as what I deemed to be effective teaching practices in an elementary classroom. I attended to these personal opinions by giving consideration to the ways I interacted with the participants. In addition I would think about my own participation in the community and the overall impact it had on the participants' communication, a topic I take up in Chapter Five. Moreover, my cultural position reflected my experience as a female middle-class White elementary school teacher. Near the end of my study, I also disclosed limitations of the research in my final data presentation in order to cultivate trustworthiness (Glesne, 2011).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study included issues dealing with the technology related to the study. It was feasible for technological glitches to occur while implementing an online component, especially in studies that involve communication via an online website. Moreover, the participants' lack of regular contributions to the online websites constrained the data, particularly in the first iteration. Participants could choose when and if to respond to one another's dilemmas online. Additional limitations may have stemmed from the participants' providing socially

desirable responses during the interviews, as there is a possibility the participants provided answers based on what they thought I wanted for my study, rather than what was actually felt and/or experienced during the blended CoPs. The same could have been true in the face-to-face and online sessions. Triangulation across data sources helped minimize this result.

Another limitation is the narrow population of the participants. All the participants were females from ages 22-32, and all but one member were White. Although this is representative of the teaching population (Feistritzer, Griffin, & Linnajarvi, 2011), it is limiting in terms of the generalizability of the study. A more diverse group of participants, in gender, age, and race, could provide a broader frame of reference for the application of CoP in other contexts. A final limitation is the short time period of the iterations, lasting 3 months each. This lack of longitudinal data restrains the ability to know the long-term impact of blended CoPs.

In this chapter, I shared the foundation of the study. I described how participants were recruited as well as the various types of data collected. I discussed my approaches to data analysis, including the specific codes that were employed. I then offered my own position in the study as well as its limitations. I next will turn to the findings of the first iteration, followed by the findings of the second iteration of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS FROM ITERATION ONE AND ITERATION TWO

Chapter four is divided into two main sections, focusing on the results from iteration one and iteration two, respectively. Both iterations addressed the main research question: What is the nature of novice elementary school teachers' discourse in a blended community of practice (CoP)? In order to understand the essential characteristics of the CoP, the research question included several sub-questions: 1) What does a face-to-face community look like, 2) What does an online community look like, 3) What is the content of the discussions in the face-to-face and online CoPs, 4) What are the differences between face-to-face and online interactions for the individual participants, and 5) How do the interactions in both environments impact each other and the participants' overall experiences?

Iteration One

Data collection for iteration one began in March 2014 and concluded in May 2014. The March session was the third face-to-face session of R&R, with the May session being the fourth and final session for the school year. There were a total of 12 participants who took part in at least one component of R&R1 (March face-to-face meeting), R&R2 (online forum), or R&R3 (May face-to-face meeting) during iteration one. Of those 12 participants, 6 participated in all three aspects of the study, referred to as the blended community. Although I examined qualitative data from all 12 participants, the 6 participants in the blended community are the focus of the study. See Table 2 for specific information on grade level and years of teaching for all 12 participants.

Table 2

Iteration One: Participant Demographics and Session Attendance

Name	Number of years taught	Grade level	Ethnicity	Gender	School Setting	Participation in R&R1, R&R2, and R&R3
Ava	1	Pre-K	White	F	Urban	R&R1
Dove	2	Fifth	White	F	Rural	All sessions
Evelyn	1	Pre-K	White	F	Suburban	All sessions
Finch	3	K	White	F	Rural	R&R3
Lark	1	ESL K-5	White	F	Suburban	All sessions
Linnet	1	ESL K-5	White	F	Suburban	All sessions
Paloma	4	Second	White	F	Rural	All sessions
Phoebe	2	Third	White	F	Suburban	R&R3
Raven	5	First	White	F	Suburban	R&R1 and R&R3
Robin	3	Third	Black	F	Suburban	R&R1
Sparrow	1	ESL K-5	White	F	Suburban	All sessions
Wren	3	First	White	F	Rural	R&R1 and R&R2

In the first iteration, the participants were able to engage in dialogue both in the face-to-face and online platforms. As will be described in both contexts, the content of the discussions was similar and there was evidence of *joint enterprise*, *mutual engagement*, and *shared repertoire*. However, only in the face-to-face community were elements such as active listening, laughter, thinking out loud and justifying each other were visible. The lack of these particular constructs in the online portion led to an overall less unified community, resulting in a quasi-blended CoP.

Nature of the Face-to-Face Community of Practice: Iteration One

Content

In this study, several themes emerged during the coding for content from the face-to-face sessions in both March and May. Many of these themes corresponded to the themes found in previous studies of R&R data (Mallous et al., 2012). Themes that had been identified in earlier

R&R studies included *Collaboration Dilemmas with Parents*, *Curriculum Dilemmas*, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*, and *Teacher Internal Conflicts*. Additional dilemma themes found in this particular study included *Logistical Problems*, *School-Community Access Obstacles*, and *Policy Issues*. Refer to Table 3 for quantitative information regarding content themes in the face-to-face sessions.

The design of the R&R face-to-face community encouraged the teacher participants to present professional dilemmas in order to gain new perspectives from their fellow novice teachers. This procedure becomes routine during the course of the four face-to-face sessions over an 8-month period. Often preparing the dilemmas in advance, many participants introduced professional issues with which they were struggling and provided opinions, guidance, and/or encouragement to fellow novice teachers. Each time a participant shared an example or dilemma related to a particular theme, it was counted as a conversational turn. For example, there were six times the conversational turn focused on curriculum dilemmas (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

Table 3

*Iteration One: Quantity of Individual Content Themes:
R&R1 and R&R3*

	R&R1	R&R3	Total
Curriculum Dilemmas	5	1	6
Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues	20	9	29
Collaboration Dilemmas with Parents	5	0	5
Teacher Internal Conflicts	17	10	27
School-Community Access/Obstacles	2	1	3
Policy Issues	0	2	2
Logistical Problems	0	3	3
Total	49	26	75

Collaboration dilemmas with parents. A common dilemma that is often troubling for novice teachers is learning how to navigate interactions with the parents of their students. An example from this study, which demonstrated the familiar *Collaboration Dilemmas with Parents*, was Evelyn's struggle with parents of a preschool student, shared during the March face-to-face session. After contacting the parents about the classroom observations that she had made of their son, Evelyn noted how the mom "freaked out on me in the classroom" and then proceeded to confront Evelyn in front of other parents. In the following excerpt, Evelyn explained that she let the parent know that she was concerned about the student and wanted to discuss the situation. She began by voicing what she had said to the parent:

We [the teachers] want to meet with you [the parents] to facilitate, to talk about how to facilitate communication for your child. The mom left the classroom in tears one day from, like, continuing to ask me, like, all these questions in the middle of the classroom with other parents coming to the classroom to pick up their children ... and [the parent asked me] are you worried about this? Well, he does that at home too and we're not worried about it. Okay, like, okay. She left in tears.

Evelyn concluded the dilemma by asking the group specific questions: "Has anybody else had to deal with parents who have been like super defensive? And how do you facilitate, like, actually helping the child?" The reaction of the R&R group to this particular dilemma centered around Evelyn's need to focus on relationship-building with her parent community in addition to the specific challenge that Evelyn faced being the parents' first experience with an outside source giving input on their child. As another participant Raven noted, "You are the first outsider for them" to which Dove quickly replied, "You are the first person to say something to them."

Advice and support such as this were commonplace in how the participants reacted to each other's dilemmas.

Curriculum dilemmas. Curriculum dilemmas were those that focused on issues related to the subject matter the teachers were required to teach. Of particular concern were mandatory testing procedures negatively impacting the teaching of the curricula. Teachers felt they spent too much time administering mandatory tests rather than teaching the curricula. Moreover, they believed administering tests stifled their creativity and, often, was not meeting students' needs. With the inundation of testing practices flooding public school systems, many of the face-to-face dilemmas regarding the elementary curriculum focused on the strain of executing standardized tests, and more specifically, the difficulty fulfilling the requirements aligned with the *Read to Achieve* initiative (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/k-3literacy/achieve/>). The *Curriculum Dilemmas* presented by several teachers noted the stress associated with simply administering the lengthy tests. In the May face-to-face session, Paloma asked Phoebe how she was doing with *Read to Achieve* in her school. Phoebe described her struggles, noting how it negatively changed both her classroom practices as well as her whole general demeanor about her profession:

You know, we only have a few more weeks left of it [testing], but I guess now ... we are essentially tracking our kids, like we have split them off [into ability groups] and I have the really, like, disengaged kids that hate to read and things like that and ... we did such a great job for so long and they loved my classroom and they were so sweet but now it's like every time they come in it's, like, how many passages are we taking today? And I gave them a huge pep talk, you know, one of my little kids is, like, he will sit at the table with me and I will literally beg him to finish it. I am like, come on buddy, you can do it! Please just finish it ... like, it's, like I hate it so much and it's the worst part of my day.

The riposte to Phoebe's gloomy monologue was one of solidarity, with Dove stating, "It's obvious that legislation and educators are not on the same page about it" with fellow participants questioning the decisions of policy makers. Unfortunately, no one could offer resolution to Phoebe and the others who were directly impacted by the required tests.

Collaboration dilemmas with colleagues. Among the broader themes found in the face-to-face meetings were *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*. Although having difficulties with coworkers is not uncharted territory for any profession, these beginning teachers frequently noted issues with fellow teachers, administration, and teacher assistants. Included in the examples were several dilemmas involving miscommunication between coworkers as well as the struggle to work with veteran teachers committed to working with an outdated basal series or not being open to new ideas.

Evelyn described a dilemma involving the turnover of several teaching assistants in her classroom. In this passage from the May face-to-face meeting, she explained her discontent:

I have now had my fifth staff change in my classroom since August, um, and ... actually like pretty much all of them, I was happy for it [the removal of the coworker]. Um, it was caused, it was caused by a coworker doing something illegal in our classroom and me overseeing it and confronting it in the moment and going to leadership about it and they made a very swift decision to suspend her, um ... and then they were waffling about whether to fire her or not. They decided to NOT fire her, and instead to make her a full-time sub at the school. Um, I just, I don't have anything else to say about my school.

After giving more information regarding the specific illegal activity and answering further questions from fellow participants, Evelyn stated that she planned on leaving the school at the end of the year. This frustration related to working with colleagues was apparent during the March face-to-face session as well when another participant presented a dilemma on being the new ESL teacher in a school that is not receptive to newcomers, to which Raven aptly proclaimed, "There are so many people you are working with ... and like, how are you supposed to navigate that? Especially as a first-year teacher? Your first time in schools? Like, ugh." There were many examples similar to the ones mentioned above that reiterated the difficulties a novice teacher had when attempting to work with colleagues and administration.

Teacher internal conflicts. Simply entering the teaching profession can bring to light many personal and emotional struggles. The theme of *Teacher Internal Conflicts* includes novice teachers questioning their teaching competence or efficacy as well as lacking the confidence to state their opinions with coworkers. In addition, this theme accounts for when the teachers are deciding whether they should remain in schools where there are challenges with colleagues, parents, students and curricula. While the presented dilemmas existed for each individual teacher, they were often met in the R&R face-to-face session with a consensus that these situations were not only justified and legitimate, but also experienced by their fellow members.

During the March face-to-face meeting, the group had discussed ESL teacher Linnet's difficulties navigating between her teaching placements and dealing with a multitude of colleagues. This sparked Wren to respond with a *Teacher Internal Conflict*, in which she noted,

I think it's hard to pick your battles ... and it's hard to know ... how much to shake things up and that's definitely something I've struggled with this year. ... And you know, it's like, maybe I should just keep my mouth shut, you know, until I am finally putting down roots somewhere. And especially 'cuz most of us are in our 20s, we're not settled anywhere and we could up and leave at anytime, so it's kinda like, so you are not really giving me a reason to stay so I will go somewhere else. I'll just do that. Then once I'll stay somewhere, that's when I'll be a part of a community and take it on as, you know what I mean? It's hard. It's hard to wait. And watch.

This example of *Teacher Internal Conflict* was received as many others were during the face-to-face sessions: with agreement and understanding. There was often a sense of support following this type of dilemma, but it was rarely met with a viable solution.

Logistical problems. Although many new technologies are intended to improve learning conditions in school, having *Logistical Problems* was a regular occurrence for a handful of these novice teachers. *Logistical Problems* includes having limited access to the Internet, "buggy" software programs, as well as the non-technology based problem of scheduling standardized testing. During the May face-to-face session, Dove was prompted by the group to give an update

on a previous dilemma involving giving online assessments to her fifth-grade students. After initially exclaiming, “Oh, those online assessments, ugh!”, she explained her issues with web-based testing:

We’ve spent 8 days trying to give three benchmark tests and there is one teacher who still has students who have never been able to log on. So, the kids now, at this point, have probably sat for about 12 to 14 hours staring at a computer. That is really frustrating this time of year. We need that time. Not watching them take some district-level benchmark that doesn’t work. They have brought people in from the like, air-hive company that fixes the Internet and stuff. The lower grades teachers are frustrated with us because like in order to try to help our Internet work better they’ve [the outside company] told lower grades teachers that you can’t even as a teacher be on the computer! ... The recommendations from the corporate company were that it should be working if you do these things and it might work for 5 minutes and then it doesn’t work and it’s really really frustrating.

In addition to the aggravation felt by the teachers by the required use of the Internet when it was obviously insufficient, there was frustration regarding End of Grade (EOG) testing procedures. During the face-to-face sessions, conversations relayed the difficulty of teaching in any grade or classroom during the EOGs. The disruption of changed schedules as well as the early calendar scheduling of the EOGs this particular school year resulted in missed instructional time as well as a lack of cohesiveness in lesson planning.

School-community access obstacles. One additional theme that emerged from the data and was different from those reported in previous R&R studies was *School-Community Access Obstacles*. There were three novice teachers who specifically taught English Language Learners (ELLs) and noted struggles with making connections to the outside community due to language barriers. During the March face-to-face session, Sparrow introduced a dilemma concerning the loss of the bilingual interpreter at her school, and the subsequent domino effect it had on the parent community:

So, now we have a front office with no one who speaks Spanish. ... We’ve, we’d gotten accustomed to it [having a bilingual employee] and now we’re adjusting, but because of

me being the ESL teacher I feel like, and I know I am not the only one looking out for my kids and their families ... but sometimes I am ... So, I kinda, I noticed recently I've stopped getting as many calls and I asked the front office if someone picking up the phone and speaking Spanish? They're like, we're not getting as many calls ... so, now it's like this awful situation where parents don't feel comfortable coming to the school and asking questions and then we know this cycle, if they don't come to school, then their kids' performance suffers and we all know what happens. We've seen it happen. It's just really horrible and I feel like I have this job to make it work for this big population. I don't know what to do.

Sparrow's struggle was met with agreement from the other participants, as this dilemma prompted three more similar dilemmas to be presented, producing an over 20-minute conversation on this particular theme. As Dove noted, "it's really stressful because like I am in a position [as a bilingual speaker] where I want to help and do what I can, but I know that it is NOT enough and I am not good at it at all. But [it's] all that we have." There was a notable amount of inquiry, support, and advice given during this discussion, with suggestions of developing a parent leader group among the ELL population as well as examples from another ELL teacher on her handling of a comparable situation.

Policy issues. The aforementioned *Read to Achieve* standardized testing procedures were discussed as a *Curriculum Dilemma* due to the negative impact it had on the novice teachers' abilities to follow the standard course of study required by the state. The particular issues surrounding required standardized testing created another type of dilemma, *Policy Issues*. One discussion revolved around the guidelines for third-grade students who did not pass the *Read to Achieve* test, and the ensuing implications of the policy:

Finch: Is the state, like the government, are they just realizing that they didn't actually support third grade at all to help them pass these tests? And like they know now that everyone is going to fail, so they don't want their state to look like a big failure so they say, so so actually all these kids are going to fourth grade!

Phoebe: I think it's all about money.

Lark: Yeah.

Paloma: I don't think, they didn't realize the ramifications of their actions when they, when every third grader was going to be in third grade again.

The aggravation with mandatory state policies led to more exchanges noting not only the difficulty in following the required procedures, but also the frustration felt by the teachers at the perceived lack of knowledge of the State Board of Education members. During the May face-to-face meeting, Sparrow provided background information on a state meeting attended by her mother, in which she suggested that teachers should attend the state meetings in order to describe the current state of their classrooms:

But she [Sparrow's mother] said, you guys, she was telling me that people have to come to these meetings and you have to tell them what it looks like, like with Read to Achieve. She said at a previous session that they [education lawyers] were presenting some of the problems with *Read to Achieve* ... and the state board of education members said well, we didn't sign off on this, this isn't what we thought it was going to look like. [Audible groans heard.]

This discussion continued to deliberate on the paucity of support for classroom teachers by the "misinformed" state government and "poisoned" policies as well as the worry felt by one novice teacher if she wore the color red in order show support for public education. At the time of this study, there were grassroots efforts encouraging citizens to wear the color red to their places of employment, including schools, on Wednesdays in order to show support for education.

Sparrow: ... Like Lark was just saying at her school, she's not allowed to wear red.

Lark: They won't, they were like if you are wearing a red shirt on Wednesday-

Paloma: WHAT???

Raven: They can't do that.

Paloma: WHAT???

Lark: They can't but they were like really-

Raven: But they can. That's the thing.

Lark: They say it but they don't say it in so many words.

Raven: That's the thing. It will be taken into consideration.

Lark: THEY COUNT THAT STUFF.

Raven: And teachers now have no, we don't have tenure so you cannot, you can't even, I, what I can't wear a red shirt! I would never tell you to wear a red shirt or if you don't wear a red shirt. Technically they can't say that. Also, they can be like [lower voice] I am so sorry your job is no longer available next year.

Policy Issues instigated some feisty outbursts and harsh criticism of the state policy makers.

There was a lot of emotional support given by the participants during this type of dilemma, but a minimal amount of practical strategies and advice.

Blending of themes. Often, themes overlapped within a single dilemma or started in one area and moved to another. For example, Paloma, a 2nd-year teacher, presented a dilemma that began as a *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*. She relayed a problem of practice involving her administration stating their disappointment in her not being able to “fix” her second-grade team. In the following excerpt, Paloma explained her dilemma:

So, the struggle that I brought to this session, sorry, I [begins to cry] but yeah, it's just like, I'm, uh, the administration is thinking of moving me [from second grade to third grade] maybe next year so that I don't have to collaborate because our third grade is departmentalized. I would teach third grade math five times a day, so I wouldn't have anyone to collaborate with because I didn't fix things this year. [Whispering] What the fuck? ... They think that's a better fit. Like, oh, oh, you're ... not a collaborator.

This conversation led her fellow participants to inquire more into the situation, asking probing questions into the motives of her administration and giving advice on ways to manage the situation. After contributions from six fellow members, Paloma explained how she persevered the situation through expressing another dilemma that fell under the content category of *Teacher Internal Conflict*:

A lot of time I can be in that place [enjoying the teaching profession]. Really a lot of time, a lot of days the way I make it through, I think, at least these kids respect each

other, at least these kids don't get yelled at all day long, a lot of times that's the only way I make my existence. And then sometimes, and then things go wrong and you're like, I forgot I was in survival mode that whole time. I feel like I am always using a strategy. I feel like I wake up in the morning like, like what am I going to do like to bring positivity to this situation. ... It's like how am I getting through of this day of crazy pants without crying. Not that I feel like I am on the verge of tears everyday, but I always feel like I am using a strategy, like I am not living a regular life, so.

The combination of several themes within the same conversation was not unusual; the content would naturally switch from one topic to the next, often circling back to the original dilemma.

No matter the theme, constant throughout was the support that novices provided one another. In each of the individual dilemmas, while the teachers provided details of their struggles, the empathy was noted in the '*you struggle, me too*' mindset. This ability to identify others' struggles as similar to their own is a defining characteristic of this Community of Practice.

Experiences in the face-to-face community

Apparent throughout the face-to-face community was evidence of camaraderie, empathy, and shared knowledge and understandings. Furthermore, as the participants engaged in dialogue, there was a structure to the conversations with a joint development of the conversational floor (Edelsky, 1981). Essentially, there was a collaborative nature to the face-to-face sessions, as the conversation flowed among the participants.

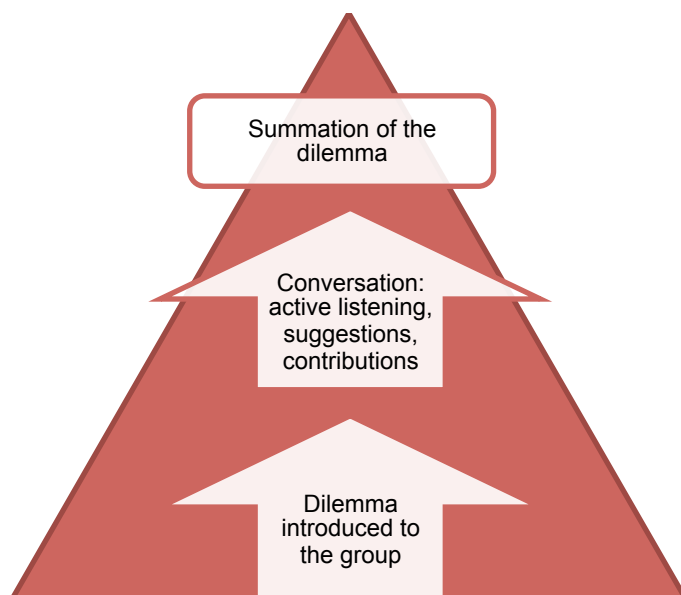
As previously mentioned, according the Lave and Wenger (1991), for a group to be acknowledged as a community of practice (CoP), the participants must experience the three components of *joint enterprise*, *mutual engagement*, and *shared repertoire*. These components are discernable in the face-to-face communities of R&R1 and R&R3, as there is evidence of the participants sharing their dilemmas with fellow members in a mutually respectful and engaging manner. Moreover, the structural elements of *domain*, *practice*, and *community* can be found in

the dialogues among the group members. The *domain* existed for these novice teachers while they shared their experiences with problems of practice, such as the previously mentioned dilemmas. *Practice* was seen in the ways specific knowledge was shared through conversations. And, as all of the members worked in a primary grade setting, the *community* was built around the commonalities of working in similar environments.

In addition to the structural elements of a CoP, there was a general pattern to the majority of the conversations in the face-to-face group sessions. A standard R&R face-to-face conversation had a focus on one particular theme. First there was an introduction to the dilemma; then subsequent dialogue with active listening, suggestions, and contributions by fellow members; finally a summation of the conversation that would either create a pause in the flow of conversation or segue into another dilemma. This general cycle would continue throughout the session. Figure 1 visually depicts a typical conversation in a face-to-face session.

Figure 1

Iteration One: Face-to-Face Conversation



Each dilemma was introduced in one of three ways: a) by a participant stating they had come prepared to present a current problem of practice, b) by the prompting of another group member, or c) when it naturally arose from the conversation. An example of a participant arriving with problem of practice to share was when Phoebe simply announced, “I have a dilemma,” during the March face-to-face session, then proceeded to describe a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*. In contrast, Paloma directly inquired of Robin during the same session, “Robin, how is third grade? Still drowning in a mountain of passages?” which prompted Robin to describe a *Curriculum Issue* that she was continuing to struggle with in her school.

One Feature of a Productive CoP: Active Listening

Participants continually provided support and feedback to fellow members, demonstrating the high level of mutual engagement for each other’s dilemmas. These conversations included advice, suggestions, resources, and active listening. *Active listening* has been described as a multistep process, including making empathetic comments, asking relevant questions, and paraphrasing and summarizing for the purposes of verification (Gordon, 2003). The goal in active listening is to develop a clear understanding of the speaker’s concern and also to clearly communicate the listener’s interest in the speaker’s message (McNaughton et al., 2008). This type of communication was apparent throughout the dialogues, as participants engaged in others’ dilemmas and often rephrased the dilemmas back to the original speaker. For example, in the May face-to-face session, Lark introduced a *Teacher Internal Conflict* regarding the loss of her teaching position for the upcoming year. As identified below, this particular segment of dialogue contained rephrasing, questioning, and empathy, all indicators of active listening:

Lark: My job is not a job next year.

Raven: Whoa. [empathy]

Sparrow: Oh, Lark. [empathy]

Raven: This is your first year? [questioning]

Lark: This is my first year.

Paloma: This was the first year they were doing it? [rephrasing]

Lark: It was the first year ... since October that they were doing this.

Paloma: Okay.

The jointly constructed conversation — essentially a collaboratively constructed conversational floor (Edelsky, 1981) — continued to progress, with fellow members inquiring into her dilemma, providing Lark with specific human resources, empathizing with her by relating their own similar experiences, and giving advice on how to prepare for an upcoming interview.

Another example of active listening and supporting fellow group members was found during a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*, presented by Paloma during the March face-to-face session. This specific dilemma began when Paloma stated, “I am having a similar situation” in response to Wren’s difficulty with the administration. Paloma briefed the group on her situation, noting issues with planning, lack of time, and poorly prepared coworkers. During this emotional monologue, Paloma noted that she was criticized for not being a team player, and her administration was moving her to a different grade level “so I wouldn’t have anyone to collaborate with.” This narrative led Lark to first ask, “Do they think they are trying to punish you or do they think they are trying to help you?” After several other comments, Lark’s follow-up was a restatement of Paloma’s dilemma: “So they don't they don't want you teaching the AIG classroom anymore, they want you to be in 3rd grade now.” Once the restatement was confirmed, Lark followed with a supportive comment, reminding Paloma to take care of herself:

I think it's important to remember that sometimes *we* put those social contracts to *our* students and to *our* community and school. *We* take them to heart more than *we* have to, for our own sanity, it's part of who *we* are as people who come in and want to be teachers and want to work in public schools but you have to, to like be able to remember that you signed that contract with yourself you're not breaking it with anyone else if you take a change or you know, whatever you decide to do (emphasis added).

After several more comments, Paloma thanked everyone for their help, and the conversation regarding this dilemma came to a close. Lark's contribution here is one of many across the data in which participants employ the collective "our" and "we", revealing the dilemma and experience as a shared enterprise rather than a singular one felt by individuals like Paloma.

Each shared dilemma in the face-to-face discussions culminated in a different way, but what was similar across the conversations was that some sort of closure was attained in each case, although this does not necessarily mean the dilemma was resolved. Rather, the dilemma had been discussed to the point where there were no more contributions provided by the participants, and the discussion came to a natural end. One type of summation was when the participant who presented the dilemma would simply thank the group for their support which would open the door for a new dilemma to be discussed. This was seen in the March face-to-face session when Sparrow stated, "Wow! Those are a lot of good ideas guys. Thanks!" At other times, there would be a pause in the conversation, signaling to the group that the conversation had concluded and a new dilemma would begin. Even though no two dilemmas ended in the exact same way, parallels can be drawn in the patterns of the summations just as they can be drawn with regard to the pattern of the conversations more generally.

A Second Feature of a Productive CoP: Laughter

Although the focus of the face-to-face sessions of R&R was the discussion of teacher dilemmas, often revealing challenging content, laughter was a key feature of the conversations. Emerging from the transcripts were many examples of laughter within speaker turns and across

speakers: in the first iteration, there were 47 occurrences of laughter by the participants in the 75 content-based turns documented in Table 3. With examples in each content theme, laughter appeared to serve several different roles during the course of the sessions: supporting and confirming in-group identity, showing agreement and support, as well as reinforcing and responding to one another (Partington, 2006). In order to understand how laughter took on meaning in this study, I turned to the literature on how laughter is used in discourse. Glenn (2003) noted the many uses for laughter, including as a “way to display like-mindedness” (p. 29) stating, “one of laughter’s most important features lies in its shared nature: that it is produced primarily in the presence of and for the benefit of other persons” (p. 30). He further explained that laughter is “strongly social, in that its occurrence, form, and meaning are shaped deeply by the presence of others, roles, relationships, activities, and other contextual features” (p. 32). Furthermore, Partington (2006) asserted, “laughter is seen as a way of signaling affiliation and alignment,” therefore it is an “important means of promoting in-group solidarity” (p. 18).

Among the examples in iteration one, there were times when the presenter would unexpectedly begin laughing at her own difficult situation. Jefferson (1984) noted how people engaged in telling difficult stories would begin to laugh. In these cases, laughter was not treated as humorous but rather as a display of the speaker’s bravery or coping skills. This can be seen in the March face-to-face session when Dove presented a rather heavy dilemma involving two sets of parents pressing charges against another student in her classroom. After relaying the difficult situation, noting that it was a “living nightmare”, Dove finished her monologue by stating, “of course, those kids who got the court restriction also rode the same bus together so, just everywhere, [begins laughing] there were just problems. So it was interesting.” After a 4-second pause, the entire group began laughing, with Raven declaring, “I, I am not laughing at your

situation.” Dove immediately concurred, “No, No, I know, it sounds completely ridiculous,” and began laughing again. While the laughter continued for several more seconds, Dove eventually circled back to her original frustration with the situation, which was the lack of support by the administration. Tannen (1984) described how this type of supportive laughter was often seen during weighty group conversations, such as this situation.

Amid the many dilemmas presented in the May face-to-face session was a spirited conversation regarding testing procedures in elementary schools. While Paloma and Dove were simultaneously presenting comparable dilemmas concerning the difficulties in using technology for standardized testing, the following conversation arose:

Paloma: But also the air conditioner broke while we were giving our, our students the [standardized testing] benchmarks on the computer. All of our labs are internal so there is a server room, so they don’t have any exterior doors, so you would walk in there and it would be literally be 80 degrees in there! [“Oh my gosh”, gasps heard] So, on top of not being able to talk or get on the computer, they [the students] are drenched in sweat and you’re like come on, just read about eco-systems [the subject of the test]! [Laughter] I can’t!!! I am shutting down. My fifth-grade body is shutting down. [Laughter]

Raven: I know this sounds completely unprofessional but I want to stick [the current state governor] into that room. [Laughter]

Linnet: There are so many times ... I probably mention his name like once a day ... if only [the governor] were here! [Laughter]

Raven: Yes! [Laughter]

Paloma: Write him a personal invitation!

Linnet: We’re on a first-name basis! [Laughter]

While the humor lightened the mood, laughter also served the purpose of bonding for this teacher community. As Glenn (2003) stated, “laughing at people or things external to the group can strengthen boundaries, solidifying members in their group identity against outsiders” (p. 30). Here, the mutual laughter was achieved by poking fun at nonmembers.

As described above, laughter appeared in several forms. Sometimes a lighthearted comment would result in the conversation going off-topic for several moments, ultimately returning the original dilemma. Other times, a quick humorous remark was made, and the laughter was brief and did not change the course of the conversation. For example, humorous phrases such as “you crazy-pants” and “shut the front door” were peppered throughout face-to-face conversations, as the teachers worked through dilemmas as a group. One group member, Lark, was particularly vocal in terms of providing laughter in a quick and sardonic manner. In the March face-to-face session while discussing standardized testing practices, Lark responded to a serious question with, “If someone asked me if I wanted to do another [standardized] test, I would probably kick them in the shins,” which was met with laughs from fellow members. In another example from a May face-to-face conversation on policy issues, Lark expressed herself sarcastically, “I feel great you guys,” which produced several laughs as well as agreement from the group. In this type of “dramatic irony”, Myers-Roy (1977) noted, “the speaker can mean what [s]he says and at the same time disclaim what [s]he says by taking on a role, frequently stereotypical or at least well-defined” (p. 118). While Lark was using sarcasm in her remark, she was also sending a meta-message of solidarity to her fellow group members, as she knew from previous conversations that many members were dissatisfied with the current education policy under discussion.

The laughter observed in the face-to-face dialogues served several purposes. There was the benefit of bonding with fellow participants over shared experiences, with an overall feeling of *we are laughing with you, not at you* mentality. This was vital for the building an in-group identity of a shared struggle. Laughter allowed individual participants to alleviate some of their frustrations, just as Tannen (1984) noted “the use of humor played a significant role in the

impact that each [member] had on the group” (p. 143). These moments of laughter, some purposely funny and some not, contributed to the overall connection felt by group members and ultimately strengthened the bonds among the members.

A Third Feature of a Productive CoP: Thinking Out Loud Individually and Collectively

Prior to the beginning of a face-to-face session, the participants were encouraged to prepare to speak about a current dilemma, depending if they had one to share with the group. This prompt was given to encourage group members to formulate their thoughts prior to the session in order to present a clear picture of the issue. However, this action was not necessary in order for a participant to share a dilemma. In fact, many of the dilemmas presented arose from naturally occurring dialogue – bouncing off another’s comment or dilemma. The data was replete with examples of the participants *thinking out loud*, often presenting their dilemmas in lengthy monologues inundated with filler words and phrases, such as “like” and “you know”, as well as the repetition of words and/or phrases. Furthermore, *thinking out loud* examples occurred most frequently during the content theme of *Teacher Internal Conflicts*, which indicated in part that the participants do not arrive at the meeting prepared to share this particular theme of dilemma, but were prompted to share once engaged with other group members.

In addition, *thinking out loud* occurred both within a speaker’s turn and across several speakers, serving different purposes for each. For the individual speaker, it functioned as a way to continuously speak while providing details and holding the conversational floor (Edelsky, 1981). When thinking out loud was used across several participants, it helped to create a sense of involvement with each other, as the group worked together through their dilemmas.

Repetition served a huge role in the instances of *thinking out loud*. Tannen (2007) noted specific functions for repetition in dialogue, such as production, connection, comprehension,

interaction, as well as coherence as interpersonal involvement. In this particular study, production was observed frequently, which allowed the participants to produce speech in a “more efficient, less energy-draining way” as “it facilitates the production of more language, more fluently” (p. 58). In other words, it enabled the individual speaker to continue talking with a reasonably small amount of effort in order to lengthen the amount of time available to decide what to say next. One example of productive repetition occurred in the May face-to-face session when Raven was responding to a fellow participant who was struggling with a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*:

Um, anyways, he, he’s made so much growth. He reminds me a lot of [a former student], like he made so much growth but they’re going to put him in self-contained next year and I’m just like, ahhhhh, it’s unfortunate. I under- like, the funding that they got which I am not sure is the same for the second grader at [an another elementary school mentioned previously] but um it was only for a year and so it’s basically, it’s basically for if a child came in unexpectedly or something and then, it’s whatever. It supplies you time to write an IEP for that and whatever, but you know.

This response demonstrates the use of both repetition and discourse markers as Raven repeats the words “he’s” and “it’s basically” as well as the term “whatever”. The production here also provided Raven the time she needed to construct her dialogue, as she *thought out loud* about how to best support her fellow group member.

Another example of production was during a discussion of a *Teacher Internal Conflict*, presented by Paloma during the March face-to-face session:

Yeah. And a lot of time I can be in that place. Really a lot of time, a lot of days the way I make it through, well at least these kids respect each other, at least these kids don’t get yelled at all day long, a lot of times that’s the only way I make my existence.

This segment demonstrated how Paloma *thought out loud*, using repetition as production to explain her dire situation. The repeated use of “a lot of” and “at least these kids” allowed her to

articulate her thoughts while continuing to provide details about the dilemma. This poignant monologue continued on for several minutes and contained additional repetition and fillers:

I feel like I am always using a strategy. I feel like I wake up in the morning like, like what am I going to do like to bring positivity to this situation. Like when I go to Lowe's foods [a grocery store] and a parent stops me and is like, for one, asks me why I am buying vegetables for one, but also complains about literally anything at like I yeah, I am always using a strategy. It's never like okay this is my life. It's like how am I getting through of this day of crazy pants without crying. Not that I feel like I am on the verge of tears everyday but I always feel like I am using a strategy like I am not living my regular life, so.

In this specific section, there were numerous examples of both repetition and discourse markers, as Paloma attempted to describe the difficulties she was facing in her community. The filler word "like" was used frequently, demonstrating the purpose of filler words in order for Paloma to produce fluent speech. Furthermore, the use of filler words could indicate her discomfort with the topic (Thornberry & Slade, 2006) and therefore allowed her the time to complete her thoughts before proceeding to the next detail.

According to Tannen (2007), there are several more functions for repetition in conversation across several speakers. For example, it can aid the members of a discourse community with comprehension, connection, and interaction as well as "coherence as interpersonal involvement" (p. 61). Tannen (2007) described this function as "repeating the words, phrases, or sentences of other speakers" (p. 61). Tannen noted the importance of the repetition of other people's dialogue, as it:

(a) accomplishes a conversation, (b) shows one's response to another's utterance, (c) shows acceptance of others' utterances, their participation, and them, and (d) gives evidence of one's own participation. It provides a resource to keep talk going, where talk itself is a show of involvement, of willingness to interact, to serve positive face. All of this sends a meta-message of involvement. (p. 61)

There is repetition of fellow group members' utterances throughout the face-to-face sessions. In the March face-to-face session, Dove had finished describing a *Collaboration Dilemma with Parents* when Lark responded with repetition:

Dove: I know it sounds completely ridiculous.

Lark: It sounds ridiculous to me that they [the students of the complaining parents] weren't the ones that were moved, you know.

This example demonstrates Lark's involvement in Dove's struggle as she repeated back the word "ridiculous" as well as supported Dove in her struggle.

The connection between *thinking out loud* and fillers as well as repetition is compelling as it is evident that these participants used these linguistic tools in order to better explain their dilemmas and connect with one another. Although not always necessary in order to provide clarity to the dialogue, this strategy aided several group members when they were *thinking out loud*, and perhaps even added emphasis to the delivery of the dilemma. Finally, it allowed them to reveal to one another that they were understood.

A Fourth Feature of a Productive CoP: Justifying Each Other

In the examples above, repetition served as a way to *think out loud*, but repetition also served as a way to build solidarity and justification for one another. Whether it was in a brief response or longer statement, there were several indications in the data of the participants *justifying each other's* responses and reactions to their dilemmas. When this type of support was given, it acknowledged that the person's feelings and/or opinions were reasonable, thus she was *justified* to have those thoughts about the issue at hand. In addition, in some cases, several participants justified their fellow participant, often resulting in a group agreement. This type of group "face-saving" is revealing in its acceptance of each other's utterances, no matter the circumstances. Goffman (1967) noted this was "a characteristic obligation of many social

relationships that each of the members guarantees to support a given face for the other members in given situations” (p. 318). To prevent disruption of these relationships, it was therefore necessary for the members to justify one another’s dilemmas as well as their personal reactions to the dilemmas.

In the March face-to-face session, Lark explained a dilemma in which her job required her to switch between teaching high school students to elementary students in a matter of minutes, with no time for planning or breaks:

Lark: So it’s also really hard to switch from the high school mentality to go teach kindergarteners.

Paloma: Right.

Sparrow: Right.

Lark: It’s just really hard to do.

Evelyn: I bet.

During the discussion, in which the focus was a *Collaboration Dilemma with a Colleague*, there was further explanation by Lark of her frustration with her colleagues, with the group recognizing the struggle by subtly agreeing with her by the regular use of “uh-huhs”, “yeahs”, and “right”. Although it is unclear if everyone agreed with Lark’s dilemma, the underlying support the members provided to Lark assured her that her actions/reactions were rational or, at the very least, she was being heard by them. In a second example of justification from the same conversation:

Raven: Yeah. That’s imp- I am just saying that that just seems *impossible*.

Lark: It is *impossible*.

Raven: It seems legitimately *impossible*.

This example demonstrated how Raven was involved in Lark's relaying of her dilemma, and that she was willing to interact with Lark while justifying her struggle with the dilemma.

In another example from the May face-to-face session, Phoebe conveyed being entrenched in giving mandatory standardized reading tests and relayed this *Curriculum Dilemma* to the group:

Phoebe: And it's like they [her third grade students] can't read them [the standardized tests] ... and they [the state policy makers] don't care.

Lark: I don't know why it's so hard to give kids stuff they can read! Like why? I'm sorry.

Phoebe: Yeah. I know.

Lark: I just don't understand why.

In this segment, the “face-saving” by Lark – her show of solidarity using a conformational comment – gave justification to Phoebe for her sour feelings towards the state policy makers and let Phoebe know that Lark was equally flummoxed. This type of exchange was prevalent due to the nature of the conversations, as each of the teachers had knowledge of the difficult mandatory testing procedures and were willing to help each other rationalize their feelings and opinions on these poignant issues.

Teacher Learning Within the Face-to-Face Community

Evident throughout the sessions are examples of the novice teachers learning from each other. It can be seen, for example, when the participants discussed how they used strategies or ideas from past R&R sessions. Other examples of teacher learning can be observed when the participants are problem solving together. Back-and-forth dialogue in which the teachers make suggestions or explain strategies was a defining quality of the face-to-face sessions. In some cases, it was clear when teacher learning had happened. An example from the March face-to-face

session was when Robin described how she used an idea from a past session to help with a

Curriculum Dilemma:

[A past participant] mentioned he did a schedule change to help [meet curriculum standards] and I brought the idea back to my school. At first, [her colleagues] were, you know, saying that is not a good idea. But I kept pushing it and said you know guys, I think, you know, everyone is going to collaborate and make sure to get our kids to, like, perform better...so now our literacy block is not broken into chunks ... and so that's awesome!

After some enthusiastic feedback from other group members, Robin commented, "I got some inspiration from [R&R] and I wanted to speak up and say that I was really glad about it." In this case, a fellow R&R participant's dilemma, which was discussed in a prior face-to-face session, made a positive difference for Robin and led to her making changes in her own school.

Teacher learning also occurred when the group searched for answers through their problem solving. This type of back-and-forth discussion often involved several members adding suggestions or making further inquiries in order to find answers to each others' dilemmas. An example of this was in the May face-to-face session when Linnet was describing her difficulty working with a colleague. After Linnet explained her students were being accused of being "lazy" when in actuality it was a language barrier, Paloma responded:

Is there something you could pre-make, some graphic organizer, whatever makes sense for your content area, and just be like, I'm gonna do this. And when you have good results you can be like see? And it's in their best interest to have good test scores in the end so if you do something and have success with it.

Linnet replied, "And I would love to do that." The teacher participants leave these sessions often with concrete strategies to try in their own classrooms, strategies that they did not necessarily have access to prior to the session. This type of teacher learning, in which problem solving was used to generate ideas and strategies, was seen often in the face-to-face sessions.

Nature of the Online Community of Practice: Iteration One

As reflected below, the online experience differed in many significant ways from the face-to-face session, particularly with regard to the dialogic components of the CoP.

Content

I created an online forum specifically for the study. The online moodle-style platform sought to mimic the face-to-face community as much as possible in terms of providing a space for participants to communicate professional dilemmas in a protected community of their peers. Similar to the face-to-face community, the themes discovered in the online forum were parallel to those found in earlier studies of R&R discussion groups (Mallous et al., 2012). Despite fewer overall numbers of dilemmas compared to the face-to-face sessions, the online community shared the themes of *Curriculum Dilemmas*, *Student Dilemmas*, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*, *Policy Issues*, and *Teacher Internal Conflicts*. Refer to Table 4, Iteration One:

Quantity of Individual Content Themes for R&R2, for quantitative information regarding content themes in the online forum.

Table 4

Iteration One: Quantity of Individual Content Themes for R&R2

	R&R2
Curriculum Dilemmas	1
Student Dilemmas	1
Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues	2
Teacher Internal Conflicts	1
Policy Issues	1
Total	6

Curriculum dilemma. During the first week of the online forum, I prompted the novice teachers with a *Curriculum Dilemma*, asking the group, “How is standardized testing going at

your school? How does it impact your teaching? How does it impact your students?” This stimulated five participants to respond, each relating their own challenges with standardized testing. However, although they each posted in the same online discussion thread, no connections were made among the separate dilemmas. Rather, there were isolated examples of frustration.

For example, Paloma posted,

As I write this, I'm administering a County Mandated Writing Assessment that doesn't come with a rubric, doesn't match the county provided pacing guide, isn't clear, and will not be read or discussed by anybody after today. This happens each quarter, but only if our Elementary Curriculum Coach can get around to making it ... so really, we only give it every now and then in an unpredictable and inane way. Today I hate testing. Harumph.

This was a typical reaction to this type of *Curriculum Dilemma*, with several posts relaying the loss of instructional time as well as the disruption in routines. An ESL elementary teacher, Sparrow noted the struggle working with classroom teachers during standardized testing due to her desire to keep a regular schedule:

I'm definitely not looking forward to the confrontations [with colleagues] that will follow, because I feel very strongly that the work I do with my kids is just as important as any "test prep" they do in their mainstream class. Not to mention that disrupting their routine, to which they've become very accustomed, can't help either! And also ... I would just miss my kids terribly. Testing is the worst.

The overriding sentiment for this theme was one of frustration and lack of control due to the rampant testing given at the participants' schools.

Student dilemma. A particularly difficult student was the focus of a *Student Dilemma* posted by Wren in the online forum. Titling the discussion thread “Behavior Problems”, Wren provided the background for this student, noting the student’s “unpredictable” mood swings and how the student negatively impacted the classroom due to the significant amount of time Wren spent attending to the student’s outbursts during instructional time:

How do I make it so she spends less time in my room aka less time disrupting our day? I thought of half-days, scheduling a time in another classroom or with another teacher,

scheduling break activities, etc. But I don't like the idea of putting the burden on someone else! (Sidenote - she hardly participates in instructional activities because of her behavior.) Of course there is so much more I could say about her and our classroom and the year but I'm just desperately looking for an answer for the rest of the year and trying not to do an injustice to her or the rest of the kids.

There was agreement among the group members in their responses to Wren's dilemma. While Paloma justified Wren's need to have the student removed from the room, Lark wrote of her own difficulties with a "high needs student". She concurred, "If you have the resources for your student to be elsewhere, and if the time is productive for her, then is it a bad thing for her to be removed from your classroom?" This *Student Dilemma* ended with two posts by Wren. The first post noted her changed attitude regarding the situation and thanked the group for their help; unfortunately, a week later, there was a follow-up post in which she relayed frustration with a decision by the administration to pull the student out of the school's magnet program. This *Student Dilemma* then became a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*, as Wren noted that she was "furious" with administration:

I knew from the beginning of the year they would try to pull her from the program and I had said if they were going to remove her, that they do it at the beginning of the year instead of after a whole year of Kindergarten in Spanish.

Wren continued to explain her discontent with this decision:

I just feel like it is highly inequitable to remove her in such a knee-jerk manner and deny her of such an incredible opportunity. She is Black and low-income and my principal claims that he was interested in the program because of its abilities to close achievement gaps for all subgroups. If that is his purpose then I feel like it shouldn't be treated as a privilege but rather a different course of study, and since the successful results are longitudinal and based on participation in the entire program, then wouldn't that be making a premature decision? Battle worth fighting or no?

Unfortunately, this particular question was never answered by any of the participants in the online forum.

Collaboration dilemmas with colleagues. *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*

was the theme of the discussion thread “Confronting other teachers...” posted by Sparrow in the online community. Sparrow wrote of an issue she was having with one teacher who was not making accommodations for her ELL student, specifically in the area of reading. Sparrow noted her anxiety in confronting this particular teacher and inquired to the group, “How do I express the difficulties my student is having without offending her? Help!” Three participants responded to Sparrow, giving suggestions and advice. Paloma gave some recommendations as well as asked new questions:

Before confronting her directly you may consider some way to address the issue with all your teachers. Is there a possibility of doing a quick presentation at a staff meeting or in PLCs one week? There's a good chance that this isn't the only teacher at your school who may be missing some good strategies for ELLs and all kids. Do you even think she's the type of teacher who might benefit from that? Or do you think she will only respond to a direct conversation?

Linnet was also forthcoming, describing her own similar experience of dealing with teachers who are “plowing through material at high speeds” and how she gave a school-wide presentation in order to alleviate the issue. Sparrow responded by asking more questions about presenting to the whole school, asking, “Have you seen any changes at your school after the presentation?” while acknowledging that this particular teacher “might respond best to a direct confrontation ... but the presentation idea could definitely work pretty well ... got my wheels turning!” The following week, after responses from Evelyn, Lark, and Wren, Sparrow gave an update on the situation. She noted that she “used a little bit of everyone's advice”, demonstrating a specific strategy to the teacher and concluded by stating, “I'm feeling really positive about where this is going now. Thanks for all the help, everyone!!”

Policy issues. Accounting for the percentage of time she spent with each student was the subject of Linnet's dilemma, presented online under the title of “EVAAS = CHAOS”. [EVAAS

is an acronym for Education Value-Added Assessment System, which is a customized software system for educators that “provides valuable diagnostic information about past practices and reports on students’ predicted success probabilities at numerous academic milestones” (http://www.sas.com/en_us/industry/k-12-education/evaas.html).] This *Policy Issue* was noted to be “SO complicated” by Linnet, as she and her colleagues attempted to determine “what percentage each teacher shares for each child’s instruction”. Linnet wrote about a particularly exasperating situation that stemmed from the “over-claiming” of one student, with the percentages of the classroom teacher, the reading teacher, plus Linnet’s percentages all totaling more than 100%. She went on to note, “When you consider how many students each classroom teacher has AND how many students each specialist is responsible for ... it gets frustrating.” While Lark and Wren provided feedback for her dilemma, there was no sense of fruition for Linnet, ending with “It’s one more stressful thing to deal with before the year is over. Actually, ours is due in less than 3 weeks...”

Teacher internal conflict. The last content theme appearing in the online forum was *Teacher Internal Conflict*. Giving an update on her career, Evelyn posted a thread called “Staff changes... and a bright future”, which highlighted an improvement in her teaching situation. This particular dilemma had been discussed in the previous face-to-face meeting; therefore Evelyn did not have to provide a great amount of detail about the dilemma in the online forum. Rather, she focused on how she only had “two more months” because she had decided to leave her current school for a job in France. This news was met with congratulations from Linnet, Sparrow, and Wren. Linnet wrote, “Congratulations!! That is such exciting news :) Hopefully the changes to the teaching situation in your room will make your last couple of months

easier. Then you'll be preparing for FRANCE!” There was no further commentary after Linnet’s contribution.

The content of the online community resembled the conversations of the face-to-face community in terms of the theme of the content areas. The themes of *Curriculum Dilemmas*, *Student Dilemmas*, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*, *Policy Issues*, and *Teacher Internal Conflicts* were deliberated in the online community, although on a much smaller scale, as there were only six dilemmas presented versus the 58 discussed in the face-to-face community.

Experiences in the online community

With infrequent dialogue and few interactions among the participants, the online community was not an overall success in terms of creating a connection between the two face-to-face sessions. Along with a sense of restraint in the conversation, there were stilted conversations left unfinished with no resolution.

I developed the online community to provide a forum for the participants to communicate in-between face-to-face sessions. Furthermore, as these participants were members of a Community of Practice (CoP), I anticipated that the structural elements of *domain*, *practice*, and *community* would be regularly practiced as they were in the face-to-face sessions. Unfortunately, this was not the case, as the sharing of knowledge and tools was not maintained, for example, in the on-line forum. Furthermore, there were inconsistencies in the responses by the participants to fellow group members, especially in the inexpedient reaction time to the dilemmas as well as the lack of replies to specific questions posed to the online community.

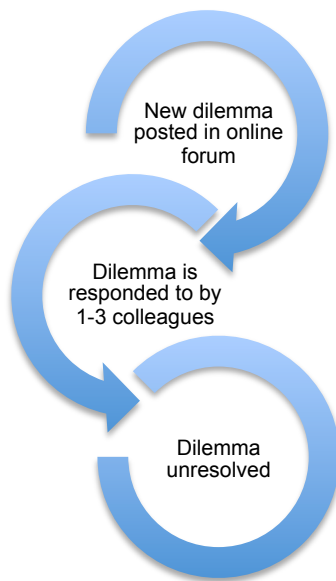
The online forum was a closed community in which the six participants contributed to the dialogue asynchronously via a moodle platform. Refer to Appendix C for images of the moodle.

Similar to the procedure of beginning face-to-face sessions with a case study read prior to the session, the facilitator prompted the group at the beginning by posting a general question about standardized testing in order to elicit initial interaction. This *Curriculum Dilemma* received five responses from the group, but there was no connection among the responses. Instead, the posts were individualistic and focused merely on their own responses, making no reference to previous contributions. In subsequent postings, there was a pattern that was consistent throughout the five dilemmas. There would be a new dilemma posted online. One to three group members would respond to the dilemma, although there was one instance when there was no response posted at all. Then, in all but one case, there were questions asked to the group that remained unanswered, leaving the dilemma unresolved. Although there were also unresolved issues evident in face-to-face sessions, the lack of resolution in the online community had a dead-end aspect due to the fact there was no one acknowledging the difficulty of solving the issue, as was often found in the empathetic utterances of the face-to-face sessions.

Figure 2 visually depicts a typical conversation in the online forum for iteration one. Beginning at the top, a new dilemma is presented in the online forum, typically under a new thread and given a descriptive title. The arrow leads to the middle section, where the dilemma was seen by others and subsequently responded to by one to three participants. The second arrow points to the lower broken circle that indicates a lack in resolution for the dilemma.

Figure 2

Iteration One: Online Conversation



A representative example from the online forum was a *Student Dilemma* mentioned in the previous section. “Behavior Problems” was a dilemma presented by Wren as she searched for advice on how to best serve her disruptive student. As described earlier, this dilemma remained unresolved as Wren posted two back-to-back posts to the discussion thread with no feedback from her fellow members. In the last post, after providing an update on the situation that now also involved the administration, she inquired to the group if it was a “Battle worth fighting or no?” but there was no reply from the group. This was typical for five of the six dilemmas presented in the online forum, with dilemmas and subsequent questions posed to the group left unresolved.

Face-saving in the online forum

Familiar to anyone who writes for either professional or personal reasons, the ability to modify one’s written work is extremely beneficial. This editing before responding to others in an online community can be notable in terms of the potential to rethink your response prior to

pressing the “send” button. The writer of the response can consider several things, including how this response will reflect on his or her character. It is evident in this study that the participants took the notion of “face-saving” into consideration as it influenced the manner in which many of them engaged in the online dialogue.

The idiomatic expression *saving face* signifies a desire, or defines a strategy, to avoid humiliation or embarrassment, to maintain dignity or preserve reputation (Brill, 2010). Goffman (1967) described the term *face* as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line [pattern of verbal/nonverbal acts with which he expresses views of the situation] others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (p. 306). He furthered the idea by noting it “appears to refer to the process by which the person sustains an impression for others that he has not lost face” (p. 308). In contrast to the conversations in the face-to-face sessions where the practice of facework intermingled with the other discursive strategies described above, the online conversation appeared to be stilted as the participants contributed straightforward and pragmatic responses to the posted dilemmas. An example of a reserved response was Lark’s contribution to a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*:

Sparrow, I also think Linnet's suggestion to offer strategies that have worked for you is a good one. I have to do this kind of thing a lot. While I can admit I work mostly with the teachers who reciprocate and want to work with me, I have found success when offering strategies to other teachers coupled with some really GOOD ready-made resources. For example, you might show up ahead of time with some vocabulary cards that your student can use to accompany the text. Or, you can create a graphic organizer or active notes strategy for your student to use during read-aloud time.

Although this response may have been helpful to Sparrow and fellow participants, it reads as if it was edited for clarity and mistakes as there were no signs of repetition or discourse markers that might suggest the idea of “thinking out loud”, as in the face-to-face sessions. Goffman (1967) noted, “the mutual acceptance of the lines has an important conservative effect upon encounters”

(p. 308). For Goffman, *lines* referred to the pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts which a person expresses views of the situation. Therefore Lark may have been overly conscious of how this particular response reflected on her and her knowledge of the situation.

As noted, face-saving was seen in face-to-face contexts, although the face-saving moves are often accompanied by other productive discursive techniques not seen in the online platform. In addition, not all face-saving actions are detrimental to the community. In fact, it can be a way to show consideration for others. As Goffman (1967) noted:

Just as the member of any group is expected to have self-respect, so also he is expected to sustain a standard of considerateness; he is expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings and the face of others present, and he is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings. (p. 225)

Therefore, the thoughtfulness for others' emotions are a benefit as long as it is not taken to the extreme, wherein the participants are not adequately expressing their true opinions.

Teacher learning within the online community

As mentioned previously, there was a lack of frequent interaction in the online community. This led to less teacher learning in the online community. Still, learning does occur here. One case was regarding a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues* that was introduced by Sparrow. After giving background on how a coworker was not attending to the learning needs of an ESL (English as a Second Language) student, Sparrow requested assistance from her R&R group members, asking "How do I express the difficulties my student is having without offending her?" The next day Paloma suggested, "Before confronting [the teacher] directly, you may consider some way to address the issue with all your teachers. Is there a possibility of doing a quick presentation at a staff meeting or in PLCs one week?" Three days later, Linnet wrote:

Maybe for you, you could meet with this teacher and share with her some strategies that have really been successful for your student when you work with her ... So maybe if you

are sharing your successes ... and stressing how they have helped the student, maybe she will be more likely to consider them or not take it so personally?

Over the next 2 weeks, there were other similar suggestions provided by Lark, Evelyn, and Wren. Sparrow ended the discussion when she noted, “I got the chance to talk with this teacher, and used a little bit of everyone's advice.” In this example, the shared knowledge of all the participants led to teacher learning for Sparrow.

Comparison of the Face-to-Face and Online Communities: Iteration One

The ultimate goal was to have the face-to-face and online communities work in conjunction as a blended community, as literature has suggested the potential for advantages such as increased flexibility and additional opportunities for socialization (Matzat, 2010). Unfortunately, there was only a quasi-blended aspect to iteration one, as it existed instead as three separate sessions rather than a joined experience. Furthermore, there were stark contrasts between the face-to-face and online communities. One area of variation included the strong appearance of laughter and “thinking out loud” (both elements of conversational congruence and collegiality) in the face-to-face group that was nonexistent in the online forum. Another difference to take into consideration was the comparison of Figure 1, the face-to-face model of conversation, to Figure 2, the model of an online conversation, which revealed the variation in the treatment of the dilemmas by the participants. Finally, there were noteworthy contrasts between the contributions of individual participants. In essence, the online component lacked some significant and important elements of a CoP, making it less likely this would be a blended CoP for the participants.

Lack of laughter and thinking out loud

Many times in the face-to-face sessions, laughter served the roles of reinforcing group membership as well as a way to support one another. In contrast, laughter or humor in written

form was absent in the online forum. The same participants would respond to posts succinctly with no sense of jocularity as part of the reply. This difference in feedback may be due to the straightforward nature of this online community versus the ability to interpret when laughter/humor was appropriate in the face-to-face sessions. Nevertheless, the lack of levity in the online forum resulted in the participants providing somewhat prosaic commentary to dilemmas. Furthermore, similar to the presence of laughter or lack thereof, there was also a dearth of “thinking out loud” in the online forum in comparison to the face-to-face community. Face-to-face participants used fillers and repetition in order to produce fluent, coherent speech both for the individual and across speakers. There were no indications of repetition or discourse markers when participants conversed online. Again, as identified previously, these discourse elements are critical to relationship building in community. The absence of these elements signaled that there was less commitment to the development of the on-line community. .

Teacher learning

In the first iteration, teacher learning was more evident in the face-to-face community than in the online community. With frequent exchanges among the participants resulting in several examples of shared knowledge, there were many examples of the back-and-forth dialogue in the face-to-face sessions. This learning becomes evident not only in the shared knowledge developed within the face-to-face sessions but also in how the participants’ discourse changes as a result of their own learning through these exchanges.

In the face-to-face session from March, Paloma was searching for help regarding *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*. She asked for “some insight” from the community on how to best address working with someone who, in her opinion, was not adequately meeting the needs of her ESL (English as a Second Language) students. This led to larger discussion on how

to work with colleagues who have differing teacher styles, leading the group to respond with overlapping dialogue:

Raven: I would so not even go there if I were you. If you are trying to stay afloat as it is with your sanity, you are going to social suicide yourself by doing anything [by confronting the colleague in question about her teaching practices].

Wren: This has come up in our group all year, is like, how do you stay on your path, like you were saying, stay true to what you believe?

Raven: And stay sane.

Wren: Stay sane, but...

Ava: Affect change.

Wren: Right. And especially, with the kind of people we're talking about [laughter]. I just don't know. And especially because, like you were saying, in [the state where they teach], a primarily rural state... there's not much investment in that.

Paloma: Yeah.

Raven later posited:

I want to re-, I want to re-, I want to revisit my statement. [Laughter] I guess my suggestion is like find what is manageable for yourself and I know that's what you're asking but like I would proceed with caution.

What is particularly interesting in this single exchange is the “learning” that happens even within the few short lines of talk. Raven initially suggests that Paloma not confront her colleague. After participating in the exchange, she revisits her initial comment, shifting from a hardline stance to one that is perhaps more measured and perhaps more reasonable for Paloma. In contrast, the online community had an inconsistent nature to it, with lengthy periods of time in between responses that caused gaps in teacher learning. There was little evidence of participants building on one another's ideas. While the face-to-face sessions were filled with group members sometimes talking over each other in order to give suggestions or add commentary, the online

community fell silent. This led to less teacher learning for the participants overall in online community.

Comparison of models of conversations

In order to better understand the similarities and differences between the face-to-face and the online communities, I created models of typical conversations in each community so as to illustrate what happened. Refer to Figures 1 and 2 for the visual models. One similarity was the way the dilemmas were introduced by a participant in order to receive feedback. Typically, the dilemma was acknowledged either via conversation (face-to-face) or written response (online). This type of *shared repertoire* was apparent throughout the transcripts, as the participants were aware that one of the main purposes of the CoP was to provide supportive yet constructive feedback to fellow members.

Although there were parallel ways in which the dilemmas were introduced, the similarities ended there. In the face-to-face sessions, for each dilemma there was dialogue with active listening, suggestions, and contributions given by many fellow members, with some conversations lasting upwards of 20 minutes with approximately 3750 words spoken. In contrast, the most responses that any dilemma received in the online forum was five, with most garnering two or three replies with an average of 1000 words written. As mentioned previously, the lack of responses in the online forum could be due to issues with the serpentine nature of the moodle and/or the participants struggling to understand the primary dilemma presented by the fellow group member.

Furthermore, there was dissimilarity in how each community ended the presented dilemmas. The face-to-face community concluded the discussion of a dilemma with a summation of the conversation, although this did not mean the issue was resolved; rather, the dialogue

would cease on the specific topic, often with the participant thanking the group for their contributions and/or transitioning to a new dilemma. There was a marked difference in the ending of the dilemma for the online community, as the vast majority of dilemmas remained unresolved at the end of study. Furthermore, two dilemmas ended with the participants asking for additional feedback and receiving no response in return. The absence of support may have impacted the overall participation.

Individual participation in the communities

The experiences of the participants varied: some participants talked often, some talked an average amount, while others engaged in conversation infrequently. The differences in individual participation are notable, as the participants explained which type of session was most comfortable for them and the resulting impact on their participation.

Whole group. There were 12 participants who attended at least one or more of the face-to-face sessions as well as engaged the online forum. There was a wide amount of variation in the amount of contributions given by each individual participant. Table 5, Iteration One: Number of Utterances per Participant, and Table 6, Iteration One: Percentage of Individual Contribution to Group Dialogue, provide the specific numerical contributions. The data demonstrate the wide spectrum of participation among the group members, with some participants' percentage of contribution in the high teens and others' are at 5% or less.

Table 5

Iteration One: Number of Utterances Per Participant

	R&R1	R&R2	R&R3
Ava	19	N/A	N/A
Dove	34	2	33
Evelyn	47	4	27
Finch	N/A	N/A	36
Lark	79	3	77
Linnet	35	6	15
Paloma	108	3	94
Phoebe	N/A	N/A	47
Raven	110	N/A	65
Robin	25	N/A	N/A
Sparrow	89	7	64
Wren	79	7	N/A
Unknown Speaker	14	0	21
TOTAL	639	32	479

Table 6

Iteration One: Percentage of Individual Contribution to Group Dialogue

	R&R1	R&R2	R&R3
Ava	3%	N/A	N/A
Dove	5%	6%	7%
Evelyn	7%	13%	6%
Finch	N/A	N/A	7%
Lark	12%	9%	16%
Linnet	5%	19%	3%
Paloma	17%	9%	19%
Phoebe	N/A	N/A	10%
Raven	17%	N/A	14%
Robin	4%	N/A	N/A
Sparrow	14%	22%	13%
Wren	12%	22%	N/A
Unknown Speaker	2%	N/A	4%

Full Participants. There were six participants who participated in all three sections of R&R1, R&R2, and R&R3. In order to better understand their interactions and contributions, I created two tables. Table 7, Iteration One: Full Participation in All Three R&Rs: Number of Utterances provides the numerical contributions made in both face-to-face sessions and the

online forum. The percentage of their contributions in respect to the whole group is seen in Table 8, Iteration One: Full Participation in All Three R&Rs: Percentage of Individual Contribution to Group Dialogue.

Table 7

Iteration One: Full Participation in All Three R&Rs: Number of Utterances

	R&R1	R&R2	R&R3
Dove	34	2	33
Evelyn	47	4	27
Lark	79	3	77
Linnet	35	6	15
Paloma	108	3	94
Sparrow	89	7	64
Total	392	25	310

Table 8

Iteration One: Full Participation in All Three R&Rs: Percentage of Individual Contribution to Group Dialogue

	R&R1	R&R2	R&R3
Dove	9%	8%	11%
Evelyn	12%	16%	9%
Lark	20%	12%	25%
Linnet	9%	24%	5%
Paloma	28%	12%	30%
Sparrow	23%	28%	21%

There was a wide range of participation levels for individual participants. Furthermore, there are patterns among the group members when comparing in which arena they were more active. The data revealed three categories of participation: a) high participation in the face-to-face sessions/low participation in the online forum, b) low participation in the face-to-face sessions/high participation in the online forum, and c) consistent across both communities.

Fitting into the category of high participation in face-to-face session and low participation in the online forum, Paloma engaged in dialogue steadily throughout R&R1 and R&R3. With the

respective percentages of 28% and 30%, she was a talkative participant, providing commentary to other dilemmas as well as introducing nine of her own dilemmas to the face-to-face sessions. Additionally, Paloma typically used creative expressions, such as “crazy-pants” and “staying in the light”, to lighten the mood in the face-to-face meetings. It is of interest to note Paloma’s frequent use of this verbal device, as there was no use of levity by anyone, including her, in the online community. When asked about her participation in the online community in the post-interview, Paloma cited that it was difficult for her to “get a clear picture” of the dilemma and admitted that she “kinda left it [the dilemmas] alone” if she felt she could not provide “viable feedback”. She further stated while in the face-to-face sessions, “you can follow the *me too* signs [a hand signal used by the group to silently indicate they felt the same way]. And sometimes that was all I had to say: Yeah, me too!” Therefore, the impediments for Paloma in the online community appeared to be a lack of the ease of conversation and visible human interactions.

Linnet’s experience was the opposite of Paloma’s, as she had low participation in the face-to-face sessions and high participation in the online forum. In R&R1 and R&R3, Linnet remained silent for the first 20 minutes and 17 minutes, respectfully. In addition, she contributed four dilemmas, in comparison to Paloma’s nine. Conversely, with an online percentage of participation at 24%, she appeared to be much more comfortable during R&R2, responding to all but one of the online dilemmas. This was confirmed during her post-interview:

I think, by nature, I am kind of introverted. I tend to be a listener rather than a speaker. So I think that having the online community kind of gave me the opportunity to maybe, write about something I was facing so that – I don’t know. It was just a little more natural for me.

Moreover, Linnet expressed that the online community was “secure” to her, noting that because the online forum comprised the same people in the face-to-face community, she felt “there is a

level of trust there”. These two contrasting experiences demonstrate the importance of providing an arena to serve all the demographics.

In essence, the CoP elements of *joint enterprise*, *mutual engagement*, and *shared repertoire* were present in both platforms in the first iteration. Also consistent were the topics of discussion. However, although the conversational congruency features of active listening, laughter, thinking out loud and justification of each other were present in the face-to-face sessions, they were absent from the online community. Additionally, the presence of face-saving in the absence of other discursive elements also resulted in constrained online conversations that did not have links to the face-to-face dialogue. This lack of connection ultimately led to the impression of a quasi-blended CoP for the first iteration.

Iteration Two

Data collection for iteration two began in November 2014 and concluded in January 2015. The November session was the first R&R face-to-face meeting for the school year, and January was the second session. For this study, the online platform changed from the moodle to Facebook. The decision to change the online platform arose from participants’ feedback during the post-interviews of iteration one. Feedback included the participants stating that the iteration one platform was “clunky” and “difficult to maneuver”. There were a total of 5 participants, each of whom participated in all three components of R&R4 (November face-to-face meeting), R&R5 (online forum), and R&R6 (January face-to-face meeting) during iteration two. I examined qualitative data from all 5 participants. See Table 9, Iteration Two: Participant Demographics and Session Attendance, for specific demographics, including grade level and years of teaching.

Table 9

Iteration Two: Participant Demographics and Session Attendance

	Number of years taught	Grade level	Ethnicity	Gender	Participation in R&R4, R&R5, and R&R6
Dove	3	Fifth	White	F	All sessions
Paloma	5	Second	White	F	All sessions
Phoebe	3	Third	White	F	All sessions
Saffron	1	K	White	F	All sessions
Sparrow	2	ESL K-5	White	F	All sessions

In the second iteration, many of the same activities seen in the first iteration were observed. There were the essential components of CoPs in the discussions as well as the features of active listening, laughter, thinking out loud, justification for each other's actions and face-saving. Teacher learning was regarded as a critical outcome of the experience as the teachers problem-solved with each other, noting how R&R sessions led them to new strategies in the classroom. Yet for this iteration, these attributes were not just visible in the face-to-face sessions but in the online sessions as well. The connections made by the participants between the face-to-face and online sessions resulted in a blended CoP for this particular group of novice teachers.

Nature of the Face-to-Face Community of Practice: Iteration Two

Content

Similar to iteration one, the purpose for the R&R face-to-face community was to provide novice teachers with a safe space to present professional dilemmas. Although most of the participants were prepared to discuss their own problems of practice, in the second iteration, the participants were provided with a case study practice dilemma that corresponded to their experiences as elementary school teachers. The same format was used at the initial R&R session for the previous year, prior to the initiation of the study. The practice dilemma during this iteration was provided prior to the November face-to-face session, in order for the participants to

become familiar with it. The case study, chosen by the coordinators of R&R, presented issues such as behavior management, dealing with parental problems, and working with unprofessional colleagues (Wasserman, 1993). This case study was used as a launching point for the discussion, as there was one new member to our group who had not previously been a member of the R&R Community of Practice. As the case study was applicable to the participants' own experiences, there was no discernable difference in the type of content presented or the total number of themes when compared to the statistics from the January session.

In iteration two, five content themes were consistent with earlier studies of R&R (Mallous et al., 2012). The themes included *Student Dilemmas*, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Parents*, *Teacher Internal Conflicts*, and *Policy Issues*. Refer to Table 10, Iteration Two: Quantity of Individual Content Themes: R&R4 and R&R6, for quantitative information regarding content themes in the face-to-face sessions. Using the same procedure as in iteration one, a conversational turn (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) was counted each time a participant shared an example or dilemma related to a content theme.

Table 10

Iteration Two: Quantity of Individual Content Themes: R&R4 and R&R6

	R&R4	R&R6	Total
Student Dilemmas	2	2	4
Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues	12	11	23
Collaboration Dilemmas with Parents	1	3	4
Teacher Internal Conflicts	4	3	7
Policy Issues	11	11	22
Total	30	30	60

Student Dilemmas. Not surprising to anyone working in the field of education, this group of novice teachers struggled with student behavior issues. An example from this study was Dove's ongoing efforts to help improve the social and academic life of Hawk, a particularly challenging student who was showing signs of autistic behaviors. Mentioned in both the November and January face-to-face sessions, Dove provided much detail on Hawk's background, including her opinion that "his parents do, in some ways, enable him." Noting in November that Hawk "just thinks very differently. And does things very differently," Dove struggled with Hawk in some ways due to the lack of support from her fellow staff members as she attempted to have him identified for Exceptional Child (EC) services. When both the local school system and an outside psychologist were unable to complete evaluations, as "neither could get [Hawk] to complete enough of the work to give a diagnosis," Dove felt isolated while she attempted to provide appropriate instruction for him.

While she was concerned for Hawk in her current classroom, Dove inquired to her fellow members: "I am worried about him for middle school. How is this child going to function when he has to go to multiple classrooms in a day? And just has anyone ever had someone like this? Or any strategies that I can use?" After asking if an Individual Education Plan (IEP) was in place, Phoebe began with the first of a series of suggestions:

Phoebe: [The students were] reading this chapter book ... The Hobbit. And they are creating this world in Minecraft [an interactive video game] and it has all these things, like writing prompts. I wonder if something like that will get him interested.

Saffron: Or if you know the motivation at home. I have a severely autistic child in my class and the motivation at home is tablet. Maybe it's tablet for him too.

Paloma followed up later with recommendations to compromise with Hawk, as he was often obstinate in his behaviors in the classroom:

Can you have explicit conversations with [Hawk] about ah, like, can you decide what your non-negotiables are? And, like, I mean, can you accept it sometimes and kind of go with it? But then teach him explicitly like ... these are times when you have to do our way and these are times when we are willing to meet halfway with you?

Dove recognized these as valid strategies, additionally stating that Hawk's classmates tried to help him in the classroom, which was a huge change from the previous years. In January, Dove provided an update on Hawk, noting how she was still attempting to have the proper accommodations in place for him before he started middle school.

Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues. As stated earlier, navigating the beginning of a career can be challenging, especially when collaborating with a wide array of colleagues in a profession that is experiencing high turnover rates. For this set of novice teachers, working with both difficult administrations as well as intransigent co-teachers were frequently cited dilemmas in iteration two. In a dilemma that she admitted had "so many issues", Sparrow presented a lengthy problem of practice involving an authoritarian administrator, Ms. Starling, and the negative impact this principal had on the school community. Noting that Ms. Starling was initially very supportive of her position as ESL teacher, Sparrow then stated, "But we've had these few instances I am just like ... WHO ARE YOU?" At a particularly troublesome staff meeting, in which the topic was assessments for all grade levels, Sparrow noted:

And she just kind of got fed up and ... because teachers were saying 'I basically feel like I am teaching to this test' and she said 'Well that's your job. It's your job to teach to the test. You are a teacher and you teach to the test'. And, just ... ever since then, I've been just like ... I see your true colors. I see where this is really coming from.

Sparrow followed this anecdote with more examples of Ms. Starling professionally degrading teachers, resulting in one teacher publicly announcing her dissatisfaction with how Ms. Starling was operating the school, with the teacher ultimately quitting mid-year. After receiving advice from Paloma to "keep your head down", Sparrow commented, "I don't know how to approach it

because she's also very cliquey. Which is a weird thing to say about a principal! It shouldn't be something you say!" Noting that the atmosphere of the school had changed from "upbeat" in the previous year to "Negative. Tense. Negative," participants offered suggestions that included getting parental involvement as well as gathering allies among other teachers. While Sparrow was grateful for the advice, she also added, "I just feel like it's a cycle where ... I, I feel like something is going to explode. That's how I feel. I feel like it's building, and building and something is going to collapse." This dilemma also appeared in the January face-to-face session, when Sparrow gave an update to the situation, noting that it was "definitely still bad", continuing on to beseech, "Is this just what it's going to be like at schools? Is it going to suck no matter where I am? Or can I expect to go someplace else and find something better, administration-wise?" Phoebe responded that it can be better in other schools, and Saffron suggested perhaps it would "be worth it" to explore other positions in the area.

Collaboration dilemmas with parents. Whereas political differences were the origin for Paloma's collaboration dilemma with parents during the November face-to-face session, both Saffron and Dove presented dilemmas during the January session that dealt with direct confrontation with parents. For Saffron, during a meeting discussing a student with autism, she had a negative encounter with his parents. This dilemma led to the following exchange among Paloma, Phoebe, and Saffron:

Saffron: They'll [the parents] sit there and be like, "Well I know why he's not listening to you." I'm like again, again, I can't change my skin color. I can't change my gender, and I'm trying my best... you know.

Paloma: Have you said those words, those exact words?

Saffron: No, I just sit there.

Paloma: I think that it's within your realm to say that. I mean, I mean, like if you say it just like that, like you said it to us. 'I can't change my skin color or my gender, but I am pouring into your kid.' Like it's okay to tell someone that you're pouring into their kid.

Saffron: Mm-hmm.

Phoebe: I know it's hard and it sounds like adversarial, but if you could, if you could find it to say that to them one time, I don't think it would be wrong or inappropriate.

This dialogue proceeded with more inquiry into the situation, with questions regarding the background of the student and if there were any other colleagues who could assist Saffron in her dilemma.

A series of negative emails was the impetus for Dove's dilemma, as she recounted a particularly contrary week regarding myriad issues. With one parent upset over attendance issues, Dove was able to resolve the issue with a phone call noting, "I mean, she [the parent] still wasn't happy at the end of it but I think she was starting to realize it was not ... there was nothing that was going to change." The second parent, who signed her email with the moniker "Mrs. Feisty", was upset with Dove due to a misunderstanding over a class assignment. The parent wrote that Dove, "was wrong and ... unfair" and her son "shouldn't be in any type of trouble" over the missed assignment. The third situation involved a parent going directly to administration with complaints. When Dove attempted to contact the parent about her issues, the parent said she didn't want to speak with her. Dove told her R&R community,

I wish that [the parent] would be willing to speak with me so that we could figure something out. You know that's all that I really want to ask [the parent] if I could talk to her. But you know, she wouldn't even listen to me.

The relaying of this particularly difficult week was an outlet for Dove to release her frustrations as she never specifically asked for advice or suggestions, although her community members provided their ideas.

Teacher Internal Conflicts. Similar to the first iteration, in iteration two these novice teachers struggled to find a harmonious balance in their professional lives. From a lack of “actual teaching” due to mandated assessments to “feeling stuck” in their schools, *Teacher Internal Conflicts* were frequent occurrences for these participants. At the November face-to-face session, Paloma explained how in August she had wavered back and forth on whether to return to teaching in the fall, eventually deciding that she would return:

Paloma: And, like got really close [to not coming back to school], but didn’t have anything like really lined up that seemed ... sort of like worthy. Really worthy, like morally worthy. Um, so I went back. And like the second week of school, I just immediately, I just ...

Phoebe: What am I doing?

Paloma: What, what AM I DOING? What a wrong decision I made! Like what a terrible, terrible decision and like, many nights of crying and much consideration on the implications of leaving mid-year and not really even mid-year but like...

Sparrow: Tomorrow.

Paloma: Yeah, tomorrow.

After providing details of her future plans of not being a teacher, she told the group, “So that’s where I’m at right now. You [Sparrow] raised your hand [signaling she had a response] ... Let’s hear it, Sparrow!” This prompted Sparrow to respond with, “Well, I don’t have an answer because I am going through the same thing, all the time.” This led to an account of Sparrow’s *Teacher Internal Dilemma*, in which she stated that “the parts where teaching happens are really fun” but “it’s all the other bullshit that makes it a lot less tolerable.” This was met with a sequence of “yeahs” uttered by the other four participants. This dilemma continued into the January session, with Sparrow stating she had begun to look for a new job, while Paloma announced that she had made the decision to leave teaching at the end of the year. No participants disagreed with their decisions.

Policy Issues. Topics such as high-stakes testing in lower elementary grades and lack of monetary support for implementing school-wide programs are two examples of *Policy Issues* experienced by the novice teachers. In January, Saffron expressed her aggravation with district-mandated performance tasks she was required to give her Kindergarten students, as it took away from teaching them “how to share and learn fine motor skills and learn gross motor skills,” among other age-appropriate objectives:

I don’t even want to get started on this because I have seven assessments. No. That’s wrong. I have ten tasks and one math assessment, plus seven other assessments to give a 5 year old [in a one-on-one setting]. Meanwhile, the assessments are completely developmentally inappropriate for a 5 year old.

Furthermore, when she “calculated how long it took me to do the one-on-one assessments,” Saffron estimated she had “wasted 2 months” already by January.

After participating in professional development for a new school-wide behavior management system, the students at Dove’s school were to receive universal screenings for cognitive behaviors. However, the district refused to provide money. Dove explained,

The whole problem is that [the behavior management system] is dependent on having a universal screening and our district will not give money to do a universal screening. They want us to do it. Which doesn’t seem like a good idea.

Furthermore, Phoebe quipped, “And do that in your spare time,” as Paloma quickly followed, “And with all your know-how ... with how to creating screenings.” This policy issue was met with fellow participants’ understanding, as it led to further discussion about lack of monetary resources in their school community.

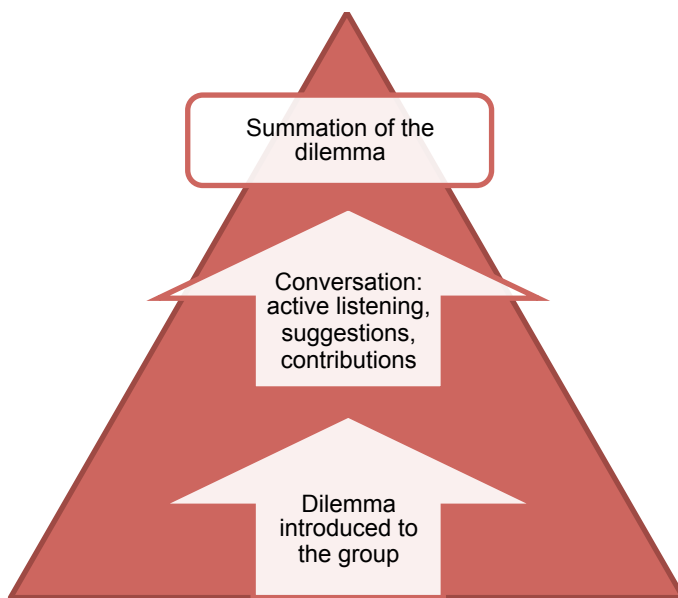
Experiences in face-to-face community

Similar to the experience of the participants in the face-to-face sessions in iteration one, the same patterns held true in the face-to-face community of iteration two, seen in Figure 3. The participants’ experiences included engaging in conversations that ended in a summation while

participating in moments of laughter and the sharing of knowledge. Furthermore, the design of a Community of Practice recognizes the necessary components of the previously mentioned *joint enterprise*, *mutual engagement*, and *shared repertoire* (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These components were observed in the face-to-face communities of R&R4 and R&R6, as there was evidence of the participants conversing with fellow members in a collegial fashion. Again, the structural elements of *domain*, *practice*, and *community* were found during group discussion. The *domain* existed for these novice teachers while they discussed shared problems of practice. Knowledge specific to their profession was shared through conversations, which was the *practice* for this *community* of elementary school teachers.

Figure 3

Iteration Two: Face-to-Face Conversation



One Feature of a Productive CoP: Active Listening

Identical to iteration one, the participants engaged in dialogue and active listening throughout all the face-to-face sessions, coming to summation with a break in the flow of

conversation or a logical switch to a new dilemma. An example of a face-to-face conversation containing active listening and rephrasing was a *Student Dilemma* presented by Dove in November. Dove had explained to the group how she and her student, Hawk, had developed a silent system of communication:

Paloma: Whoa. [empathy]

Sparrow: It's fascinating. [validation]

Dove: Yep. Or like you know, if he needs to do something, I'll like point to three things and he likes to try to figure out what I am trying to ... well, if I point to the board and point to his planner, [he recognizes] Oh I need to write something in my planner!

Paloma: He wants to figure it out. [rephrasing]

Dove: He wants to figure it out. [rephrasing]

Although no conversation was homogeneous and no dilemma concluded in the same exact way, there was a familiar structure to iteration two face-to-face conversations. This pattern would include introduction of the dilemma from a participant; active listening from fellow group members; discussion that may include advice and resources; and the summation of the dilemma, in which the discussion would naturally segue into another problem of practice.

A Second Feature of a Productive CoP: Laughter

Similar to the data that emerged from the first iteration, laughter was used in iteration two as a conversational tool to foster in-group solidarity and support. Of the 60 content-based turns in R&R4 and R&R6, 107 instances of laughter appeared in the dialogue and were present in all content themes. As in iteration one, laughter was:

seen as a way of signaling affiliation and alignment ... affiliation is used to mean the expression of solidarity with another participant on an affective, interpersonal plane, whereas alignment means communicating agreement with what another person has said, that is, approval of the opinions and sentiments he or she has expressed. (Partington, 2006, p.18)

In the November session during a discussion of a *Policy Issue* about receiving emails from the state Department of Instruction regarding outages of school-based software, Paloma relayed,

Because definitely if a teacher is in a testing situation, and trying to get their kids on the computer, you know what I've got? [Snaps her finger] A minute to check my email to see if there's a notification about this. [Laughter] Hold on kids!

Her humor was a break from the otherwise grim situation of dealing with completing online standardized testing procedures. Later on, after Saffron had explained how her Kindergarteners had not engaged in any holiday craft activities typical for that time of year, Paloma told her, "You make that hand turkey, girlfriend. [Laughter] Like one way or the other." In both of these examples, there is mutual solidarity and support given by the members in the form of laughter.

There were many examples of laughter in the January session, but two in particular highlight the typical humor used during this CoP. In one case, Paloma was relaying her struggle with a *Student Dilemma*, with Phoebe providing a witty remark:

Paloma: But no, they're just a kid and their brains are little bit mashed potatoey instead of mostly brain like. You know what I mean? It just happens, they're just children.

Phoebe: Mashed potato instead of a baked potato. [Laughter]

Paloma: Baked potatoes. Yes!

In a second example from January, Dove was providing background to a *Collaboration Dilemma with a Colleague*, when Paloma asked a humorous question:

Dove: I feel really good actually about my administration. And I really feel like they have good manager skills, but they really are instructional leaders.

Paloma: That's awesome.

Dove: It's awesome, but I'm kind of having the opposite problem where...

Paloma: The administration is too good? [Laughter]

In the second iteration, laughter served many purposes for this group as the building of relationships was strengthened by the laughter shared with fellow group members (Tannen, 1984).

A Third Feature of a Productive CoP: Thinking Out Loud Individually and Collectively

Revealed through close discourse analysis, extemporaneous monologues given by participants were a feature of the dialogues in iteration two. The same as in iteration one, these occasions of individuals “thinking out loud” were evidenced by the use of filler words and repetition and most often appeared during *Teacher Internal Conflicts*. Previously mentioned in iteration one, Tannen’s (1984) theory that repetition served specific functions has bearing in this iteration as well. Again, the use of repetition granted participants additional time in order to collect their thoughts and produce reasonable discourse, both individually and across participants.

In November, Saffron used both repetition and filler words in order to explain a *Teacher Internal Dilemma*. After listening to Paloma talk about her struggle to go to work everyday, spending much of her time in “survival mode”, Saffron responded,

Like you come out of teaching, you come out of the school of Ed, and you have all these creative ideas in your head and you are SO excited about teaching and SO excited about meeting your kids and you have all this excitement and you get PUSHED down and pushed down and pushed down by everything you have to do and you’re told to do.

In this example, the use of repetition in particular allowed Saffron to articulate her difficulties being a first-year teacher. In another example from the same session, Sparrow was relaying a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*. In particular, she was giving background on an incident involving a teacher resigning from her position mid-year, the subsequent verbal backlash by the principal, followed by the lackluster email the staff received regarding the

negative occurrence. Phoebe inquired if more happened after the email, prompting Sparrow to express her concern:

NO! I was like surely something going to happen! We are going to have a meeting! We are going to have a Come to Jesus moment! We're going to do something! She, well, like, she, I showed up to school on Monday. This was a Monday. I showed up at school, like oh God. Everyone was just kinda, like ... nothing.

The repetition of several phrases as well as the filler word *like* allowed Sparrow the time to organize her thoughts and continue to describe this specific dilemma.

Instances of *thinking out loud* across participants allowed group members to both participate and demonstrate their involvement with one another, as the group echoed one another's words. In this example from the November face-to-face session, Sparrow was explaining the low morale at her school and how she wanted to take action to combat it:

Sparrow: I am trying to figure out, cuz everyone is unhappy, it's trying to figure out who is unhappy enough as I am, [and wants] to do something about it. And especially because I got tap into, because my parent population is...

Phoebe: Is different.

Dove: Is different.

Sparrow: Yeah, is different.

The repetition of the phrase “is different” provided in-group solidarity as these members knew Sparrow's situation in her school, knew her parent population, and provided support to her by both the repetition and finishing of her sentence. As in iteration one, iteration two demonstrated the link between delivering comprehensible dilemmas while *thinking out loud* and the use of linguistic tools of repetition and filler words for creating a sense of connection with each other.

A Fourth Feature of a Productive CoP: Justifying Each Other

Similar in iteration one, restating and echoing dialogue were not only characteristics of *thinking out loud*, but for justification as well. This approval of a fellow CoP member, whether it

was one word or longer soliloquys, was a defining quality of the face-to-face interaction in iteration two. Emerging from discourse analysis of the transcripts, this justification again had a connection to Goffman (1967)'s idea of face-saving, in which the participants supported each other through verbal acceptance and physical gestures. The importance of maintaining their relationships with one another throughout the sessions was demonstrated through these justifications of one another.

In the November face-to-face session, all participants had read a case study prior to the session (Wasserman, 1993). Prompted by this case study on a particularly difficult staff meeting, Paloma presented the context of a faculty meeting at her school in which the staff discussed the county's school improvement plan. Paloma described the agenda of the meeting as "all manners of disheartening, awful things," such as the removal of teaching assistants, mandatory lesson plans and compliance checks. At the end of her description, she stated, "Anyway. I just feel like I've been in this meeting [from the case study]", spurring on Sparrow to reply quickly with, "Exactly. I feel the same, I feel my school is, like, one step behind you." Paloma responded with a "Yeah." Sparrow went on to describe her own experience with difficult meetings with her principal, in which the staff was told to "teach to the test." At the end of her explanation, Sparrow provided justification to Paloma by saying "I, also, I feel you." Only 2 minutes later, Dove had given background on a similar *Policy Issue* in which she "had to go back and completely restructure like the percentages and everything individually because the district said you have to give grades for this but they didn't tell us how to do it." Paloma immediately justified her frustrations by announcing "I am just doing a 'me too' right now" and gesturing with the hand signal symbolizing her familiarity with Dove's predicament.

A simple statement such as “I see what you are saying,” spoken by Dove after Phoebe had provided some guidance to her during a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleague*, was another type of justification seen in the January session. At other times, there would be a succession of “yeahs” repeated after a particularly difficult dilemma was delivered, allowing the *face-saving* to be justified by several participants at the same time. Other quick utterances that gave grounds for a participant’s feelings were when Phoebe told Saffron, “Yeah and I totally agree with you,” or when Sparrow told Paloma, “We get it,” when she was discussing her leaving the classroom at the end of the school year. It is in these smaller statements of agreement that much *face-saving* occurred for these participants, allowing them to feel welcome to express their feelings in this community of practice as well as legitimizing their opinions.

Teacher learning within the face-to-face community

The face-to-face community of the second iteration was rife with examples of teacher learning, as the participants engaged with one another, attempting to provide strategies and offer solutions to dilemmas. Paloma explained in the January face-to-face session how she was prepared to come R&R with questions, hoping to learn strategies from fellow teachers:

When I was thinking about R&R like a week ago ... I was going to come here and be like, I don’t know what to do with my kids. My whole class, I don’t get them, I don’t, I don’t understand what makes them tick. I’m not reaching them on either of these levels. I’m not teaching them to the test and I’m not getting them to critically think, and I don’t know what to do.

After explaining her dilemma in more detail, she noted at the end of the previous workday she thought, “I have got to go to R&R. I’ve got to figure out what other strategies I can use.”

Another example of teacher learning began with a discussion of teaching students to read who are below grade level. This discussion from the January face-to-face session prompted contributions from all the participants, each member asking questions or relaying information

about how they tackled this common issue. Phoebe, in particular, was frustrated by two students who were “still reading on a first grade level”. She explained to the group:

I don't know how to teach [my students] how to read. I don't know how to teach kids how to read. I'm a third grade teacher, I've always been one. I don't really know. I've been doing research on it but I don't know how to teach [reading at the phonics level]. I don't know. What do you do?

Paloma gave some insight to Phoebe on how she handled this issue in her classroom, especially when the students are beginning to notice they aren't performing at the same level as their peers.

I have some kids who have ... a defeated attitude where they look around and they are like, 'That person wrote a page and I'm still learning my first words. I guess I'm kind of dumb' ... I have tried to talk to with them like [and tell them] you have prior knowledge just because you are human. So like even though you are staring down the barrel at a passage called Tracking Trains, and you can't, you can't like read any of the words but you have seen train, and you can look at the picture, and you can know that you have enough prior knowledge to know it's going talk about cars. You see the word cars in there. ... Less of, how do we sound out of word... more on what they know.

The sharing of knowledge by Paloma was acknowledged by Phoebe, as she noted she try the strategy but still felt that she didn't “know enough”.

Nature of an Online Community of Practice: Iteration Two

Content

The themes found in R&R5 aligned with those in earlier studies of R&R discussion groups (Mallous et al., 2012). The themes of *Curriculum Dilemmas*, *Student Dilemmas*, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*, *Teacher Internal Conflicts*, and *Policy Issues* emerged from online data. There was one new category not found in earlier studies that dealt with providing information to the group, coded as *Informative*. Refer to Table 11, Iteration Two: Quantity of Individual Content Themes for R&R5, for quantitative information regarding content themes in the online forum. Similar to iteration one, the online website resembled the face-to-face community as much as possible in order to establish a place to post and discuss dilemmas,

resources, and articles. During iteration two, the online platform switched to a more popular social media website, Facebook.

Table 11

Iteration Two: Quantity of Individual Content Themes for R&R5

	R&R5
Curriculum Dilemma	1
Student Dilemmas	2
Collaboration	2
Dilemmas with Colleagues	
Collaboration	1
Dilemma with Parents	
Teacher Internal	1
Conflict	
Policy Issues	1
Informative	7
Total	15

Curriculum Dilemma. In early December, Paloma was struggling with how to manage the upcoming winter holidays in her classroom. She began her post by asking, “Anybody else have a hard time with the holidays at school?” going on to explain that she “wants to expose [her] kiddos to the other winter holidays – Diwali, Chanukah, etc.” but was receiving resistance from her fellow teachers who strictly wanted to focus on Christmas. She reached out to the CoP asking if anyone could “fill in those holes”. After the author posted some questions and a link to a poster with resources for teaching the holidays, Sparrow followed up announcing that she “struggle[s] with this a lot too!” noting that she sent out an email with “alternative holiday ideas” to her staff. She then inquired, “Paloma, have you found a way to handle it?” Paloma described how she was able to integrate other “quality” literature into the school day, and that she had “been drawing from [the author’s] list too. And today my kiddos did research mini-projects on Diwali and Hanukkah.”

Student Dilemmas. Both postings coded as *Student Dilemmas* focused on Dove's student, Hawk. Previously discussed in the November face-to-face session, both postings regarding Hawk were prompted by the author inquiring once for an update, then 5 weeks later, asking "how he was doing lately." Dove responded to the first post with a long paragraph, writing, "Since we met I tried allowing for more independence," continuing with details of how the parents felt he should be retained and have Dove as his teacher again. In addition, Dove mentioned she was actively seeking out the school counselor in order to fill out paperwork for an Exceptional Child (EC) evaluation. She noted that she was "all ears for suggestions" as she was frustrated by the lack of communication with the school counselor. She ended by thanking the group for their "suggestions at [the face-to-face] R&R to be more proactive about finding out information." Both Phoebe and Saffron responded to Dove positively, as Phoebe wrote, "It sounds like [Hawk] is doing better and that you're finally getting some answers about his evaluation ... thank goodness!" and Saffron supported her by noting, "Just know you are doing the best thing for Hawk and you are doing an AWESOME job!" Paloma was more inquisitive, asking Dove, "How do you feel about retention? How worried are you about this new suggestion?" Dove thanked Paloma, stating, "I do not feel that retention will benefit him at all," explaining that she had administrative support for her decision. In January, Dove responded to the author's question of Hawk's progress, noting, "He has been doing okay," and describing him as a "work in progress".

Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues. At the November face-to-face session, Sparrow presented a detailed dilemma regarding the difficulties she had with dealing with new administration at her school. In the 3rd week of the online group, the author inquired if the situation had improved. Although Sparrow did not initially see the post, she later responded,

Things are ... much the same. I guess everyone is sort of settling into the routine of insanity, so it all seems normal at this point. That worries me, though, because I know it's NOT normal! I'm just trying to stay focused and do what I know is right for my kiddos. ... And at some point will have to confront them with a meaningful conversation about what next year will look like ... Because it certainly won't look like this, or else I'm outta here!

This post was “liked” by the author, which is an indication of approval in this particular social media website.

The week before the January face-to-face session, Paloma reached out to the online group, writing, “Sooooooo ... Today my administration asked me to leave my class and go teach the AIG [Academically or Intellectually Gifted] classes. Help?!?!” This post spurred quick responses from both Dove and Sparrow, as they inquired for more details as well as her interest in changing classrooms. Paloma responded quickly:

I have made it known to my administration that this will be my last year, so they've said that they are hoping this might rejuvenate me. Perhaps not a great reason for them, but selfishly, that's ringing loudly to me because I've been so stressed about my class this year. I have struggled all year because I feel like I am failing them, like I don't understand them and what makes them tick, and I especially don't feel like I understand what makes them learn. The pros- it would be easier, way easier. The cons- the reasons the current AIG teacher is leaving will still be there, my current kids will be "relegated" to a potential string of subs until the position is filled.

Dove replied to Paloma, “Looking forward to discussing Saturday,” with Sparrow following with, “Me too! ^”. This dilemma was discussed in full during the January face-to-face session.

Teacher Internal Conflict. During the 4th week of participation in the online forum, the author posed to the group, “How's everyone feeling, this day before we all go back for 2015? I know this can be a tough one to get up for tomorrow!” This generated posts from four participants, all stating their sense of unrest about returning to work after the winter holiday break. Phoebe wrote how she felt “EXTREMELY unprepared”, Sparrow responding with “I feel completely unprepared (still) too, Phoebe! And have y’all noticed that the kids come back from break suddenly seeming way older? It's blowing my mind!” Dove noted she was “with Phoebe

... I'm excited to see everyone's faces tomorrow but not for the work that comes with it.” Paloma commented she had already gone back to school for a work day “and I had a physiological response to being back at school- elevated heart rate, darty eyes, etc. Hopefully the kiddos will mellow me out?” Paloma followed up her own post with a post the following evening: “Sooooo ... cautiously optimistic that some of the structural changes I made to my classroom are working out really well ... Cross your fingers!” which was “liked” by both Dove and Sparrow. Although there was no specific *Teacher Internal Conflict* presented by an individual, there was indication of discord at returning to their classrooms following winter break.

Policy Issue. Difficulty with assessments was the topic of a *Policy Issue*. Prompted by the author, “If anyone had any challenges lately to share that we can help with?”, both Paloma and Saffron wrote about issues they were experiencing in their classroom. Paloma noted she was “up to my ears” in reading passages, finishing her sentence with a sarcastic “Woo hoo testing!” Then, she relayed how there was a “surprising refresher course” that was unnecessary and that some of the content in the assessment “may not be exemplary”. She finished her post with the simple expression “What?!?!”. Saffron responded back to the post with a series of assessments she was giving to her Kindergarten class, stating that it was “enough to drive anyone crazy”. She wrote:

Luckily my principal is starting to understand the intensity of these assessments. ... In Kindergarten all assessments have to be given one on one and therefore ... take almost an entire month (all day every day) to complete. That's A MONTH of instruction lost. This is just crazy to me but apparently it is only going to get worse next year. I have been stepping out of the first year teacher box and speaking up ... hopefully, put the focus back on the kids and away from all of these developmentally inappropriate tests. Here's to hoping some of that will stick!

Although this was the end of the discussion online, this and other *Policy Issues* were brought up in the face-to-face community in January.

Informative. Nonexistent in the online forum in iteration one, the content theme of *Informative* appeared in iteration two. As the platform was a social media website well known for providing information to its consumers, this category of delivering information to participants is not surprising. The author posted information regarding how to contact other participants as well as several links to websites promoting professional development opportunities of interest to this elementary teacher CoP. The online community was also a way to inform the group about upcoming face-to-face sessions, as Paloma posed the question, “When is the next R&R?” to the author of the study. This particular post was answered by the author and viewed by all the participants.

Experiences in the online community

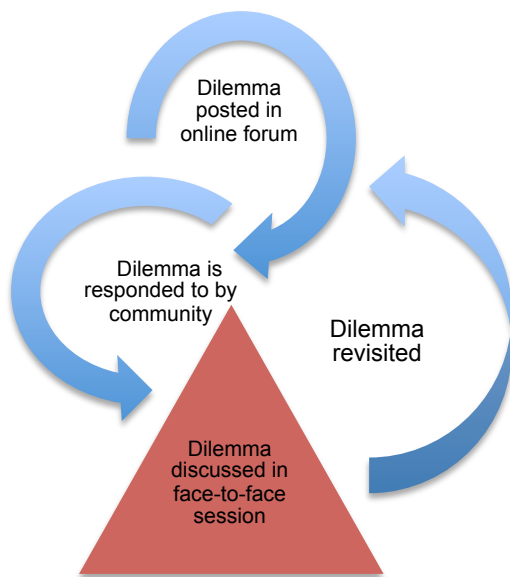
Evidence of fluid conversations, with humor and engagement with one another, defined the online experience for this iteration. I provided access to the online community beginning immediately after the November face-to-face session. During the 10 weeks between the two face-to-face sessions, the participants engaged in asynchronous online conversations as well as posted resources to the private website. Refer to Appendix D for images of the online community. Moreover, there was consistent activity in the online community, with the participants involved in providing each other with the three essential components needed for a CoP: *joint enterprise*, *mutual engagement*, and *shared repertoire* (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Figure 4 visually represents a typical conversation in the online forum for iteration two. First, a dilemma is posted on the main page of the website, in the top arrow. That arrow leads to the center section, indicating the responses posted by fellow participants. The second arrow points to the triangle, demonstrating how the conversations were discussed in the subsequent face-to-face session. Finally, this conversation is revisited in the subsequent sessions. An

illustrative example from this online forum was a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues* posted by Paloma. Discussed in the previous section, this dilemma was described by Paloma, received inquiry and suggestions from several group members, and ended with both Dove and Sparrow noting they were “looking forward to discussing [on] Saturday.”

Figure 4

Iteration Two: Online Conversation



One Feature of a Productive CoP: Active Listening

Absent from the online community of the first iteration, active listening was present during the second iteration. Group members engaged in online dialogue with one another that contained rephrasing, questioning, and empathy, all indicators of active listening. In a conversation prompted by myself, the following interaction occurred:

Mandy: How's everyone feeling, this day before we all go back for 2015? I know this can be a tough one to get up for tomorrow!

Phoebe: EXTREMELY unprepared. I opened my laptop for the first time last night.... YIKES!

Dove: I'm with Phoebe. [empathy] I did read a book on a long car trip today about differentiation that got my brain going though, so that was a bonus. I'm excited to see everyone's faces tomorrow but not for the work that comes with it.

Paloma: We had a work day on Friday and I had a physiological response to being back at school- elevated heart rate, darty eyes, etc. [empathy] Hopefully the kiddos will mellow me out? Soooo...cautiously optimistic that some of the structural changes I made to my classroom are working out really well... Cross your fingers!

Sparrow: I feel completely unprepared (still) too, Phoebe! [empathy] And have y'all noticed that the kids come back from break suddenly seeming way older? It's blowing my mind! [questioning]

The heavy use of empathy created a sense of '*I understand your situation – I am feeling it too*' among the participants. This type of interaction served the purpose of letting the participants know their dilemmas, their struggles, and even their successes, were acknowledged in the community.

A Second Feature of a Productive CoP: Laughter

There was a congenial quality to the online community in iteration two, with the use of jocular phrases and emoticons, which are representations of facial expressions such as “:-)” symbolizing a smile. For example, while giving background on a *Student Dilemma*, Dove explained that she had received a note from a parent that was “literally taped to [the student’s] jacket with my name on it so that I would get it LOL [laughing out loud].” This shared online laugh was written in order to bolster in-group solidarity (Partington, 2006), as the fellow participants had prior knowledge of this particular student from conversation during the previous face-to-face session. Dove used the same type of humor again during the second *Student Dilemma* presented online when she described this same student’s progress in her classroom. She wrote, “And dare I hope/wish this is evidence that he is more passionate about school?!?! LOL

[laughing out loud].” In this case, Dove used online laughter to display “like-mindedness” (Glenn, 2003, p. 29) that she and her fellow teachers understood the strain of motivating students to learn.

Paloma also used a sense of humor in some of the heavier topics, especially when discussing the delivery of assessment to her students. After the author prompted the online group, “Has anyone had any challenges lately to share that we can help with?”, Paloma responded, “Well, I know that I am up to my ears in Amazing Lasers, Harvest Mice, and Kwan the Artist. Woo hoo testing!” which referred to the books that she was repeatedly reading with her students during an assessment task. Here, Paloma’s online humor was used for group bonding, as her fellow group members were familiar with those books as assessment materials, and the exclamation at the end was sarcastic.

A Third Feature of a Productive CoP: Thinking Out Loud Individually and Collectively

Although there was clearly no verbal dialogue in the online forum, an examination of the transcripts revealed there was a sense of the participants’ writing and responding to each other in an impromptu manner. Thus, *thinking out loud* was found in the circuitous and repetitious writing of the posts. Responding to Sparrow and Dove during a *Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues*, Paloma wrote,

Yeah, so there is a lot. I have made it known to my administration that this will be my last year, so they've said that they are hoping this might rejuvenate me. Perhaps not a great reason for them, but selfishly, that's ringing loudly to me because I've been so stressed about my class this year. I have struggled all year because I feel like I am failing them, like I don't understand them and what makes them tick, and I especially don't feel like I understand what makes them learn. The pros- it would be easier, way easier. The cons- the reasons the current AIG [Academically or Intellectually Gifted] teacher is leaving will still be there, my current kids will be "relegated" to a potential string of subs until the position is filled.

In this example, Paloma seemed to be thinking and writing simultaneously, using repetition of the words *year*, *easier*, *don't*, *feel*, *like* and *what makes*. In addition, there is an unplanned nature in her response, as if she were typing and thinking without pausing for reflection.

There was sense of *thinking out loud* in Dove's explanation of her feelings about a *Student Dilemma*, in which both repetition and off-the-cuff writing were present:

By remembering that as students, they are works in progress before, during, AND even after they are in our classrooms. Maybe what I'm seeing is exactly the progress he needs to make on his life's journey even if it's not the ideal progress that I expect? I think sometimes I expect that I can fully develop the children into the people I want them to be in the one year I have them.

Working through her own feelings about this particular student, Dove repeated the words *progress* and *expect* as she asked a rhetorical question, to which she attempted to give an answer.

In both Paloma's and Dove's examples, their need to work through feelings and ideas about difficult situations was directly related to how they wrote about them in a more spontaneous manner.

Face-saving

Like in the first iteration, aspects of face-saving appeared in the second iteration, as the participants considered others' impressions of them as they wrote their posts. Responding to Paloma's *Curriculum Dilemma* about wanting to expose her students to lesser-known winter holidays, Sparrow wrote,

I struggle with this a lot too! This year I sent out an email to the staff with "alternative holiday ideas" ... Most were pretty appreciative! I end up having a lot of conversations with my kiddos about why we aren't "doing Christmas" when they come with me ... It's a good convo to have though. Paloma, have you found a way to handle it?

This post indicated Sparrow's understanding of the situation, but also represented herself as someone who was able to overcome the difficulties associated with it. Paloma replied to Sparrow's question:

I'm still struggling with how normative my school and colleagues are- all of the Jehovah's Witnesses have to go to the office on that last day before break because their teachers are doing Christmas gift exchanges!! What the hell?! But beyond that, I feel comfortable with my balance.

In this example, Paloma gave a candid view of her issues with this dilemma, but then “saves face” by noting her level of “comfort” with the situation. Goffman (1967) explained this face-saving behavior:

When a person senses that he is in face, he typically responds with feelings of confidence and assurance. Firm in the line he is taking, he feels that he can hold his head up and openly present himself to others. He feels some security and some relief. (p. 307)

Paloma was optimistic here that she had handled the situation, balancing the need to teach diverse curricula to her students while showing her self-assurance in her abilities.

Another face-saving technique involved the use of farewells and positive politeness. For Goffman (1967), “Farewells sum up the effect of the encounter upon the relationship and show what the participants may expect of one another when they next meet” (p. 318). Saffron used farewells often in the online community. For example, she ended three of her replies with, “Hope everyone has a wonderful Hump Day tomorrow!”, “Hope everyone is having a good MLK Jr. Day” and “Hope everyone has a fantastic Friday!” As the newest member of the CoP and as a result, the least well known among the participants, Saffron was using this face-saving mechanism in order to establish her willingness to be a worthy member of the CoP. Moreover, phrases such as “Have a good day [are] a quintessential act of positive politeness: The speaker wishes for the hearer what the hearer wishes for himself” (Brown, 1990, p. 25). In this case, although Saffron was sending well wishes to her fellow CoP members, she probably was hoping the same for herself. These face-saving moves reflected a desire to engage in a productive community. Furthermore, they were accompanied by other discourse moves.

Teacher learning within the online community

Teacher learning happened in several instances in the online community of the second iteration. In some cases, learning occurred when the group simply asked the CoP a question.

One example is when Paloma asked the group,

Did anybody else get a surprising "refresher course" on MClass [an online portal for professional development] that wasn't such a refresher? At mine they told us that some of the exemplars [for a standardized assessment] may not be exemplary. What?!?!"

In this example, Paloma was both searching for an answer to her question as well as validation this was a nonsensical request by her district administration. Saffron responded to Paloma, noting that she too was struggling with assessments and that it was “enough to drive anyone crazy.” She went on to provide some background on Paloma’s question, giving information on how the assessments were administered in her district.

In another example from the online community, Dove gave a detailed outline on three separate *Collaboration Issues with Parents*. She received feedback from Sparrow, Paloma, and Saffron who provided some guidance, noting she had a “similar experience” and explained how she dealt with the problem. After writing some suggestions, she wrote, “Sometimes parents just don't fully understand and don't know who to put the blame on other than us!” In this example, teacher learning occurred through the shared knowledge between the participants.

Comparison of the Face-to-Face and Online Communities: Iteration Two

Characterized as “seamless” by Paloma in her post-interview, there was a cohesive nature to the second iteration as there were similarities in R&R4, R&R5, and R&R6. With subtle differences due to the type of medium used for conversing, there was a resemblance in the way the participants interacted in these sessions. Engaging in conversations about their content dilemmas, there was laughter, repetition, and dialogue in both types of sessions. In addition,

there was a similarity between the two models of conversations in the second iteration. On the other hand, similar to iteration one, there was a difference in individual participation, as there were some members who were consistent in their online activity, while others were not.

Engagement with others across the sessions

In iteration two, there was a stronger sense of community overall compared to iteration one, with some conversations continuing throughout the 3-month study. The participants' ongoing involvement with one another *across* the three sessions created a stage for a more flowing discussion, with very little need to update one another on their professional lives because of the online forum. Moreover, there was a sense online that the participants were engaged in back-and-forth dialogue, much like in the face-to-face sessions. This could be observed in the way the participants began the face-to-face session by asking for updates on an online conversation. Participants, rather than me as facilitator, initiated these updates. In addition, there was online laughter (with the use of acronyms such as LOL for laughing out loud) that corresponded to the way laughter was experienced in the face-to-face sessions. In terms of engagement of the participants, there were parallel experiences in the face-to-face and online sessions.

Teacher Learning

For the second iteration, teacher learning occurred within the face-to-face and in the online session as well as *across* the sessions. This was unique to the second iteration, as there was knowledge sharing happening as the participants discussed dilemmas and gave strategies with fluidity across mediums. In an example from the November face-to-face R&R, Dove relayed a dilemma regarding parents of Hawk, a particularly needy student whose parents were in constant communication with her. It was suggested by Paloma to consider limiting the amount

of contact with the parents because “it might be an enabling situation... and continuing such an open [line of communication] might perpetuate the problem.” In the online community, she said she tried some of the strategies suggested to her, noting “Since we met I tried allowing for more independence and not communicating as much with Hawk's parents. The week after R&R I only spoke with Berlin's dad one day at car rider line, but by Friday I had a note from his dad.”

This note introduced a new dilemma: how the parents now think Hawk should be retained and remain in Dove's class for another school year. After explaining the issue in more detail, Dove stated, “So I am all ears for suggestions.” The next day, Phoebe gave some encouragement to Dove while Saffron noted she empathized with her. Saffron wrote,

Like some of us said [in the face-to-face sessions], once we get the parents talking, it's amazing how quickly things can move. If his parents think he needs to be retained and you (or they) express that to administration or the counselor, that might be just the move needed to get another/more in-depth evaluation in order to better understand Hawk. ... Just know you are doing the best thing for Hawk and you are doing an AWESOME job!

Paloma followed Saffron by inquiring to Dove about the retention issue: “The retention piece is ringing out to me. How do you feel about retention? Do you think name meant it for real? How worried are you about this new suggestion?” Dove responded, thanking everyone for the suggestions, and felt retention was not the answer. This conversation then continued in the January face-to-face session, as the group shared more strategies with Dove on how to best deal with this particular challenge. This example of teacher learning for Dove was significant to this study as it demonstrated the sharing of knowledge *across* the sessions as would be expected in a blended community of practice.

Comparison of models of conversations: A Blended Model of CoP

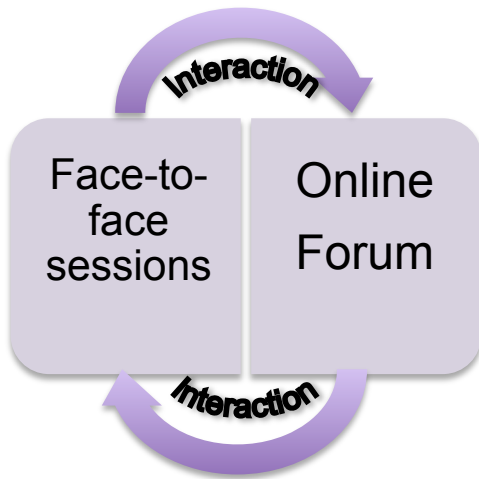
In the second iteration, the dilemmas did not end at the conclusion of an individual R&R session; rather they filtered into one another. Conversations that began in the first face-to-face

session (R&R4) in November were discussed online (R&R5), then were updated during the next face-to-face session (R&R6). Furthermore, the participants did not need prompting from the facilitator to begin the conversation at the January face-to-face session; Paloma began the discussion stating, “It’s been very active [online] this week... I think one of you two [Sparrow or Dove] need to go!” This *pick-up* from the online forum to the face-to-face demonstrated the eagerness of the participants to continue conversations. .

In order to better comprehend the congruous nature of these sessions, I developed models of the typical conversations for both sessions. Refer above to Figures Three and Four for the visual models. For the face-to-face conversation for iteration two, the model is identical to the model for iteration one, with an introduction to a dilemma, conversation with active listening, and the summation of the dilemma. On account of the overall flow for the conversations in the online community, the model includes elements that represent how the dilemma was posted online, responded to by the participants, discussed again in the face-to-face, then revisited again in the next session. This created a cycle of conversations instead of an impasse. See Figure 5 for a visual of an ideal blended community.

Figure 5

Ideal Blended Community



Individual participation in the communities.

Although there was cohesiveness for this blended community, there were different levels of individual participation. Five group members participated in the three sections of R&R4, R&R5, and R&R6. Table 12, Iteration Two: Number of Utterances Per Participant and Table 13, Iteration Two: Percentage of Individual Contribution to Group Dialogue were created to better understand each individual's participation.

Table 12

Iteration Two: Number of Utterances Per Participant

	R&R4	R&R5	R&R6
Dove	130	6	137
Paloma	180	8	200
Phoebe	109	2	170
Saffron	51	3	102
Sparrow	178	9	149
TOTAL	648	28	758

Table 13

Iteration Two: Percentage of Individual Contribution to Group Dialogue

	R&R4	R&R5	R&R6
Dove	20%	21%	18%
Paloma	28%	29%	26%
Phoebe	17%	7%	22%
Saffron	8%	11%	14%
Sparrow	27%	32%	20%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

There was more consistency in the level of contribution during iteration two, with three members participating similarly across all three R&R sessions. Dove, Paloma, and Sparrow were equally active in all three R&Rs in communicating with fellow participants, contributing an average of 20%, 28%, and 26% of the time, respectively. In regards to her face-to-face participation, Paloma noted in the post-interview:

I would say I am a good participant. I try really hard to be equal parts listener and speaker ... and these, these participants I really connect with, especially from the continuity from having been in [R&R] with most of them last year.

The author followed up with a question about how she perceived her online participation.

Paloma responded,

I would say good. I would sometimes initiate a post, um, and I would respond to most peoples [posts], so yeah, I would say I would keep track of it. I think about it actively, as you know, a place to go.

In addition, Paloma noted she spent 5–10 minutes a week reading and responding to the online forum, but in the last couple of weeks of the study, it was “probably closer to 30 minutes” per week. Another consideration is that Dove, Sparrow, and Paloma were full participants in iteration one. This know-how of how the face-to-face and online communities worked together may have contributed to their rates of participation.

Phoebe was a regular contributor in the face-to-face sessions; however, she rarely posted in the online community. Although she stated she was “very comfortable with online communication” during the pre-interview, she only contributed to 7% of the online conversation. When asked for her opinion on her participation in the online community, Phoebe noted,

Not very good! I’m not very good ... I’m trying! I think I like being able to express myself [by talking face-to-face]. I don’t even like to text-message. Like, if I am trying to say something, I will call. Just because, it’s easier for me. And I guess, to talk, instead of type in, I don’t know. That’s just me.

Her lack of online communication was referred to during the January face-to-face session, when the session began by noting the increased activity in the online forum over the past several weeks, to which Phoebe exclaimed, “I’m really sorry y’all. I will get better at it! I’m trying!” Moreover, when Dove was beginning to discuss her dilemma, she noted, “So I guess to fill Phoebe in...” then proceeded to give background that had been provided in the online community. Phoebe’s lack of participation in the online community did have a small impact on the flow of conversation in the face-to-face session, although it was only mentioned explicitly this one time.

As the only new member to this CoP, Saffron admitted in the post-interview that she was reluctant to speak in the first face-to-face session, as “everyone knew each other and I was the newbie ... I didn’t know how everyone would react to me saying certain things.” In the online community, she was also tentative at first:

I was a little hesitant about being the first one to comment on something because, not that I was afraid that anyone would be like, you’re stupid. I didn’t think that at all. But I was like, maybe I am not saying the right thing, like, you know, just like in teaching, you are still not sure of yourself in your first year, so you’re like, uh what do I say?

These initial tentative feelings Saffron had lessened by the January face-to-face, as her participation grew each time, from 8% in the first session, 11% in the online forum, and 14% in the last session. She recognized this increased confidence in herself, stating,

We built the foundation of feeling comfortable with each other, you know, that first time [in the face-to-face session]. And that continued through to the online portion, and again, that made me feel even more comfortable ... so although I haven't seen you in so long, we've had this online community, so the comfort level is still there. So I think that helped.

In this statement from the post-interview, Saffron acknowledged her growing willingness to participate in the overall CoP due to the ability to communicate between sessions. Her experience as the “newcomer” to the group directly relates to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) idea of legitimate peripheral participation, as her participation steadily increased across the three sessions of iteration two.

Conclusion

Findings from the two iterations of the study demonstrated the variation that can occur when developing a blended community of practice for novice teachers. The contrasts observed in the iterations highlight the importance discursive language plays in the formation of the community. In the next chapter, my focus is on looking into the reasons for the differences between the two iterations, as well as providing answers to the research questions. I present two case studies of individual participants in order to discover how the blended community met their needs. I then discuss implications for both novice teachers and blended CoPs. Finally, I provide some initial recommendations for future research in this area of scholarship.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of discourse in a blended Community of Practice (CoP) comprised of novice teachers. The need to create sustainable and productive support systems for novice teachers has become increasingly more consequential as the attrition rates of this group of teachers continue to rise (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This study demonstrates the potential for blended CoPs to be one type of viable professional development for novice teachers, as there were indications that participants felt supported while participating at varied levels in the online and face-to-face components.

As this study demonstrated, a productive way for teachers to learn is through a CoP. As examined in Chapter Two, there is research on face-to-face communities that worked well, on online communities that are less successful but are still functional, and on blended communities that varied in their level of success. I did this particular study to examine how a blended CoP could, using discourse analysis to look at the content of the conversations in addition to how the participants used language to build community. I learned that in order for the blended community to work well, certain features are essential, not the least of which is an accessible online platform. I discerned that when the online platform is substandard, the blended community doesn't work as well, resulting in less talk among participants evidenced in less discursive community building and thus, less learning. In contrast, when the online platform was successful, the discourse featured evidence of community-building patterns. Furthermore, the

conversation was seamless between the forums, resulting in the fluctuating boundaries and the longevity that are so critical to the success of a CoP (Wenger et al., 2002).

This chapter is divided into five sections. First, I will revisit the research questions, reflecting on the two studies together. Next, I will closely examine the differences between the two studies as a way to begin to theorize what aspects support the development of a blended community of practice. In the third section, I share possible implications of this study for novice teachers and blended communities. Finally, I provide recommendations for further research and follow this with a conclusion of the study.

Responding to the Research Questions

The main focus of the study was an examination of the discourse in a blended CoP comprised of novice elementary school teachers. In order to examine the nature of this community, there were five sub-questions that were explored: the experiences in both face-to-face and online contexts; the content of the conversations; the differences between face-to-face and online interactions for the participants; and the impact of the interactions in both environments on one another as well as on the participants.

What does a face-to-face Community of Practice look like?

Although it would vary based on the contributions of the participants, there was a basic pattern to the R&R face-to-face sessions. Gathering the participants in grade-level specific groups around a table, the facilitator would begin each session by asking the novice teachers if anyone had a dilemma they were willing to share and receive feedback on from the community. From here, talking ensued in a back-and-forth manner, as topics were raised and discussed in a congenial and candid way. Many times the conversations segued into each other, at times creating overlapping dialogues that resulted in several dilemmas being discussed within the

larger context. During these sessions, the participants were encouraged to contribute to the conversation as they wished although if a lull in talking occurred, the facilitator would prompt the group in order to keep the flow of conversation moving forward.

The face-to-face sessions of R&R are where the foundational elements for building the blended community began. During these sessions, the participants started to develop relationships with fellow members, while at the same time establishing themselves as young professionals in this novice teacher community. With most participants coming to the sessions prepared to present a professional dilemma, it is during the face-to-face conversations when participants began to build bonds while sharing difficult, often emotional problems of practice. Through the support provided by fellow members by means of providing empathic advice as well as active listening, the members of the CoP were able to gain new perspectives from others who understood their issues, often because of their own first-hand experiences. Dove noted in her pre-interview that after leaving a face-to-face session of R&R:

I feel like I have just a general calm and peace of mind about what I'm doing, um, after I leave [R&R]. And it gives time just to think about teaching so when I walk away I feel a lot better about myself.

The supportive behaviors of the members in the face-to-face sessions contributed to the overall feelings of camaraderie for one another, especially for the four members who participated in both iterations of the study: Dove, Sparrow, Paloma, and Phoebe. In her post-interviews in January, Sparrow said, "Knowing [the other participants] already really helps a lot," while Phoebe noted, "I feel like I know everyone really well because of [iteration one]," which indicated their level of familiarity with their fellow group members. Moreover the previously mentioned face-saving measures carried out by the participants set the tone for support, as there were occasions when

being conscientious of one another's feelings and reactions was important for building trusting relationships.

Furthermore, another important detail is the use of politeness among the group members in the face-to-face sessions. Acknowledging Goffman's (1967) face-saving theory, Brown and Levinson (1978)'s *positive politeness* is described as any effort to meet positive face needs. For example, Sparrow's courteous response "Wow! Those are a lot of great ideas! Thanks!" during the March face-to-face session was an effort to let her fellow members know she appreciated their contributions. Politeness is similar to face-saving in its method to preserve and maintain rapport, and Lakoff (1973) was one of the first to consider politeness in conversations. In a later book, Lakoff (1979) gave two premises for a civil exchange: be clear and be polite. Grice (1975) acknowledged that treating dialogue simply as an information-exchanging process was an oversimplification due to the complexity of the social factors, that is politeness, which should be recognized as a part of the conversation. Fraser (1990) supplemented Grice's maxims by adding three subrules: don't impose, give options, and make the person feel better, noting, "each of these are oriented to make the hearer 'feel good'" (p. 224). These types of politeness moves are seen throughout the face-to-face sessions of both iterations of the study. They are used in part as a way to develop a sense of community among participants.

What does an online Community of Practice look like?

Following the first R&R face-to-face sessions of both iterations, the participants had the opportunity to communicate via a private online platform, only available to members of the novice teacher CoP. Due to feedback from the participants following the first iteration of the study, the online component changed from a customized moodle platform to Facebook for the second iteration. Therefore, the two online communities do not resemble each other and will be

treated separately in this section.

For iteration one, the customized moodle was available to the participants beginning immediately after the face-to-face session. As facilitator, I posted a welcome message to the group and asked about testing procedures at their schools (a topic in the previous face-to-face session) in hopes of generating interaction in the online community. After 5 days, there had been one post by Dove, to which no one responded for another 5 days; on the sixth day, Evelyn posted on the discussion thread started by Dove, but this response did not reference Dove's post at all. Rather, it just relayed Evelyn's own struggle with testing. This example is representative of the lack of overall interaction among the participants, which persisted throughout the 10 weeks on the online community. When there was interaction, it was very straightforward with none of the back-and-forth dialogue seen in the face-to-face community.

During the post-interviews of the first iteration, I asked participants to give their opinions about the online community. Overwhelmingly, the customized moodle was not well received by the participants, as several referred to it as "clunky" and "complicated". As Evelyn noted in her post-interview:

I didn't get any notifications [that there had been postings] ... I had to go, like, back and forth from page to page on my browser. And I could have been missing a button or something but, um, you know, to click on the question then read the question and then to reply to it ... it was a lot. And if I wanted to see anyone else's reply I had to go to THAT page and read those and then go back and reply to the original thread. It, it was not so much that it was like too much work, just more than like it seemed just very convoluted.

Paloma's comments in her post-interview echoed Evelyn's, as she was also disappointed by how the moodle functioned:

The moodle is a little bit clunky. It is! [laughter] It's a little bit clunky! I was lucky in that I was already in a class for [an online teacher website] and I knew the moodle so I had been there ... I had used that tool recently and it was on my radar of places to go ... and having to wait for 30 minutes for your comments to be moderated. ... That kinda took away the authenticity of the conversation! That was another thing!

The cumbersome nature of logging in hindered the success of the online forum, as two of the nine participants in iteration one never signed into the moodle during the 10-week period. Ava, one of the participants who never logged in, noted in her post-interview in May how another website would have better suited her needs:

Probably because I can get on Facebook more easily and I am more familiar with typing on there, so, um, and I would already be logged in, usually ... If it could be just a private group on Facebook, it would've been easier.

Similar feedback reverberated among other members, as their opinions of the first online community were overwhelmingly negative. For example, while Lark mentioned, “once I got in, it was fine,” she also stated, “Yeah, the first few weeks [of iteration one] I just couldn’t figure out how to log in and didn’t know what was going on with the moodle.” A critical impression of the moodle persisted throughout the study, resulting in some participants’ lowered involvement in the blended community. In many ways, the impression of the moodle from the participants’ perspective was one of a formalized requirement, much like a class they were mandated to participate in, rather than a choice they were getting to make on their own.

By contrast, the online platform chosen for the second iteration was well received by the members of the CoP. On the basis of participant feedback, the online platform changed from the moodle to a private webpage on Facebook. Participation was overall more consistent, with all group members contributing uniformly across each face-to-face and online session. Unlike the nonparticipants in the first iteration, everyone posted a response at least twice in the second iteration. An illustrative example from the second iteration began with a post by Paloma, asking for feedback on a dilemma with her administration. After posting her issue, ending with “Help?!?!”, Sparrow responded within the hour asking for more details, with Dove quickly following with additional questions as well as providing feedback. After another post by Paloma,

both Dove and Sparrow responded that they were “looking forward” to discussing this issue at the upcoming face-to-face session. Of interest is although Saffron and Phoebe did not post in the community, both saw the discussion thread and were prepared to talk about it at the face-to-face session. Therefore, although Phoebe did not have a strong online presence, she was involved in the online community. In her post-interview in January, she noted how she “would sometimes read [the online posts]. I knew about Paloma’s [dilemma].” This ability to read dilemmas online, even if a participant did not respond directly, strengthened the overall connectedness of the second iteration.

There was a sense that Facebook invited a relaxed type of conversation that the moodle was unable to provide. From the beginning of the Facebook community, the level of comfort of the participants was apparent in the various styles of communication they used: for example, the use of expressive language (ex: What?!?) as well as the use of emoticons (such as ☺ to indicate happiness or agreement). Moreover, the participants communicated in briefer, casual ways, often writing quick yet supportive comments; sometimes it was simply the click of the “like” key that gave an indication they saw the post and wanted to show recognition, even if there wasn’t time to give a longer response in the moment. When written responses were given, active listening was evident, showing that the participants were engaged with each other during the online conversation. In many ways, Facebook’s platform *invited* the participant to know more of the whole person, as both Sparrow and Paloma noted in their post-interviews that Facebook allowed them to see other parts of each other’s lives beyond the struggles of a novice teacher. This invitation to know the whole person external to their immediate problems of practice extended the boundaries for this blended community of novice teachers. Essentially, whereas Facebook

was an extension of the face-to-face interactions, the moodle fell short in terms of the capabilities to incite back-and-forth dialogue.

What is the content of the discussions in the face-to-face and online CoPs?

The premise of the R&R community is to provide professional support to newly inducted teachers by meeting in discussion groups several times over the course of a school year. In these support groups, the novice teachers could discuss both their challenges and their successes with other professionals working in similar grade levels. In subsequent sessions, the participants continued discussions of their dilemmas and offered possible resolution strategies. For this study, this included the online component in which the participants could exchange their views via posting in the moodle or website. The content was similar in the face-to-face and online sessions, as both had themes that corresponded to the themes found in previous studies of R&R data (Mallous et al., 2012). Such recurring themes included in both the face-to-face and the online communities were *Collaboration Dilemmas with Parents*, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues*, *Curriculum Dilemmas*, *Teacher Internal Conflicts*, *Policy Issues*, *Student Issues*, and *Policy Issues*. Two themes only found in the face-to-face sessions that differed from what was found in the prior R&R data were *Logistical Problems* and *School-Community Access Obstacles*. There was one additional theme found only in the online community: *Informative*.

Discussed in depth in the previous chapter, the themes of the R&R CoP dealt with topical issues faced by many novice teachers. A closer look at the quantitative data of the number of times a theme appeared showed a clear propensity for the discussion of three themes in particular (see Table 14). Over the course of the two iterations, *Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues* was brought up in 56 conversational turns (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), the most of any content theme. It was not surprising to see 36% of the conversations originating from the

struggle of working with fellow teachers and school administration especially as many were new to professional positions. As the novice teachers discussed navigating their complex work environments, this type of conversation would snowball as other members added their own narratives on this content theme. The theme of *Teacher Internal Conflict* appeared in 24% of the dialogue; again, this is not surprising as this theme dealt with the emotional and personal issues of simply being a teacher. Whether it was questioning their own competence for teaching or wondering if teaching was the right choice of profession for them, this particular content theme was often tearful and met with much empathy from fellow group members. With 17% of the conversational turns, *Policy Issues* was a prominent theme. At the time of this study, educational policy was a widespread topic in the state as issues such as teacher tenure, teacher pay, and state-mandated assessments were making headlines not only with education professionals, but also with the general population.

Table 14

Quantity of Content Themes: Both Iterations

Content Theme	Total for both iterations	Percentage of total
Collaboration		
Dilemmas with Colleagues	56	36%
Collaboration		
Dilemmas with Parents	10	6%
Curriculum Dilemmas	8	5%
Informative	7	4%
Logistical Problems	3	2%
Policy Issues	26	17%
School -Community		
Access/Obstacles	3	2%
Student Dilemmas	7	4%
Teacher Internal		
Conflicts	36	24%
TOTAL	156	100%

What are the differences between face-to-face and online interactions for the individual participants?

Individual participants interacted in the face-to-face and online communities in different ways. For some participants, such as Linnet, their interactions in the face-to-face community were minimal, yet they were highly engaged in the online community. For others the reverse was true, with participation in face-to-face as the desired medium for sharing and a nominal amount of interaction online. This type of participation was reflected in Paloma's interactions during the first iteration; however, she changed her level of participation in the online community in iteration two. There were also participants who were more balanced overall, sharing in both mediums rather equally. Sparrow is representative of this type of participant.

Participation: high online, low face-to-face. Linnet was a participant in iteration one. She was an elementary ESL teacher in her 1st year of teaching. Interested in “maintaining a connection to the university,” she felt that R&R would be a “safe space” to share her dilemmas while “venting and getting support.” When asked during the pre-interview about the particular ways R&R had supported her in the past, she stated

I think one of the things that R&R helped me with is navigating my interaction with my colleagues. ... I don't think you can really predict what kind of people you will be working with ... so I think the professional challenges discussed in R&R related to, um, the interpersonal interaction with colleagues has helped me. I think R&R has definitely helped me with that.

In this quote, Linnet referred to her need to improve her relationships and communication with colleagues. This is a point of interest, especially when examining her participation rates. Linnet was coded as having low participation in the face-to-face sessions (9% in R&R1 and 5% in R&R3) and high participation in the online community (24% in R&R2). Therefore, for Linnet, the blended community was about using the online community to discuss her issues, as she noted

in her post-interview, “It was just a little more natural for me.” No longer did she need a strong voice in the face-to-face sessions; the blended aspects allowed this self-proclaimed “introvert” to express her thoughts and give her opinions in a platform that was comfortable for her. The example of Linnet demonstrated how blended communities work for more reserved individuals, as this form of online expression enabled her to participate in a way most agreeable to her needs and level of comfort.

Participation: low online, high face-to-face in iteration one; equal in iteration two. A participant in both iterations of the study, Paloma was an elementary teacher in her 4th year of teaching during the first iteration, and 5th year during the second iteration. Paloma had participated in R&R for the past 3 years as of March 2014, noting in her pre-interview that she found the sessions to be “so motivating, so healthy, and such a respectful environment that I have yet to find anywhere else.” The most frequent contributor in all the face-to-face sessions, averaging 28% of the conversational floor (Edelsky, 1981), Paloma was confident when it came to expressing her opinions. She was also the “inquirer” of the group; she often probed her fellow members to elicit more information on their dilemmas. In addition, Paloma added her sense of humor to many face-to-face conversations with witticisms such as “you crazy-pants”.

Self-assured in the face-to-face sessions, Paloma maintained a strong presence in that context throughout the entire study. However, during the online community of the first iteration, her participation dropped to 12%, the second lowest of any participant who logged on. When asked about her involvement in the online community, Paloma noted, “I was there a moderate amount, and I gave a moderate amount of input. I wasn’t extremely diligent, but I didn’t forget about it either.” She mentioned the difficulty she had in communicating online due to the lack of visual gestures:

And sometimes it was like, ah, you know when we are in the face-to-face sessions and you can follow *me too* signs. And sometimes that was all I had [to contribute]! I just wanted to say yeah, *me too*!

Unable to contribute in the manner that she wanted, Paloma chose to remain silent in those online situations where she felt her contributions would not satisfy the needs of her fellow group members.

In iteration two, Paloma's participation changed along with the move to the online platform. Her participation rates became consistent across the board, with an average of 27% of the conversational floor in face-to-face sessions and 29% in the online community. When asked if the second iteration of the study felt like a community, Paloma replied,

I think this [iteration] it definitely feels like one. I REALLY like Facebook a lot better than the moodle we used the first time. The, um, it just, it's just a natural extension of the social media that we are already doing.

For Paloma, the blended aspect of iteration two gave her ample opportunities to share and discuss her issues in a place she felt comfortable. In many ways, she was a leader for this novice teacher CoP, as she had more classroom experience than the other participants and was also in her 4th year of participating in R&R, more than anyone else. This leadership extended from the face-to-face to online in the second iteration, as she spoke of the "enhanced" nature of R&R due to the online component as well as the importance of keeping the same people in each session:

I think it's enhanced by the online continuation, I feel like things are... I feel like things were enhanced, and my participation was enhanced, because there isn't as much ground to cover in between each session. Like maybe in the early years, in the early years [of R&R], I would have new people [in my face-to-face group] and would have to fill in people about my own professional dilemmas and the context, and also have to hear ALL of their context before we could get to their issue. And so, I feel like my participation and the conversation [in the blended community] in general is richer because we don't have to overcome much before we get to the topic.

This sense of not having to start from scratch each time a session began was one of the benefits of this online community, as Paloma recognized the richness of the conversation.

Participation: similar across both mediums. Sparrow's individual participation was consistent across all six R&Rs, with an average contribution rate of 23% in the face-to-face sessions and 30% participation rate in the online forum. For Sparrow, having the blended community meant a greater level of communication and more opportunities to interact with fellow group members. In both formats, she presented her own dilemmas as well as frequently commented on others' issues. When asked in the post-interview about her opinion of the blended community, she answered:

I think it worked together well. I think people were able to check in about stuff we had talked about before, in the face-to-face, and also um, I guess knowing who the people were in the group, it was easy— it made it, made it clear and what kinds of questions would be beneficial to pose or good ones for the group to respond to, but yeah I think it worked well together.

As a result of her consistent participation across all six R&Rs, Sparrow noted at the end of iteration two, “it [the blended community] was really useful for me.”

Seen in the examples above, individual participants interacted in the face-to-face and online communities in the way most comfortable for them. The ability to communicate in a preferred method is one of the characteristics of these CoPs. Of further note is the issue of whether both iterations detailed here should be considered to be blended communities; this topic will be addressed in the next section.

How do the interactions in both environments impact each other and the participants' overall experiences?

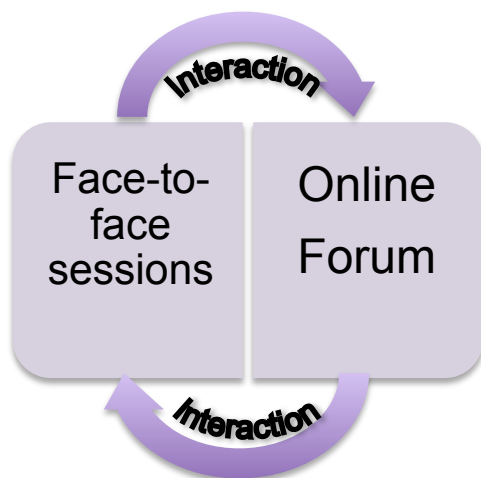
Before addressing the impact of the face-to-face and online communities on each other as well as the effect on participants' overall experiences, it is essential to clarify the characteristics of an ideal blended community. In an ideal blended community, the communication would continue from the first face-to-face session to the online community, with the online

conversation extending into the next face-to-face session (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008).

Furthermore, there would be a fairly close balance in the amount of communication, with the participants contributing relatively equally across both mediums (Graham, 2006). Figure 6, Ideal Blended Community, visually depicts the interaction between the face-to-face and online sessions.

Figure 6

Ideal Blended Community



With the wide range of participation in this study, there is ample data confirming that the CoP served more than one particular type of participant. As mentioned in the previous section, in iteration one both Paloma and Linnet were on opposite ends of the continuum between high participation in the face-to-face sessions versus high participation in the online forum, respectively. There was less variation in iteration two, with three participants contributing to the dialogue on a consistent basis; however there was one participant, Phoebe, who was much more participatory in the face-to-face sessions than the online forum. Nevertheless, even as these participants engaged in a way most comfortable for them, each felt they were involved in the

blended aspects of the CoP. In Phoebe's post-interview in January, when asked about the overall experience, she noted,

I would say the experience felt both [separate and blended]. They are separate to me, because I am way more engaged and active [in the face-to-face] sessions. But they felt pretty singular in that I feel like I know everyone really well here ... and when I would get a notification [online], I would know who it was, it wasn't a random person, it was Paloma or Sparrow.

I made models in order to better understand these two types of participants. For Paloma, her participation in iteration one was such that the face-to-face community played a much larger role, as indicated in Figure 7, Blended Community: Majority Contributor in Face-to-Face. For Linnet in iteration one and Phoebe in iteration two, the online forum was where each of them actively participated, as seen in Figure 8, Blended Community: Majority Contributor in Online Forum.

Figure 7

Blended Community: Majority Contributor in Face-to-Face

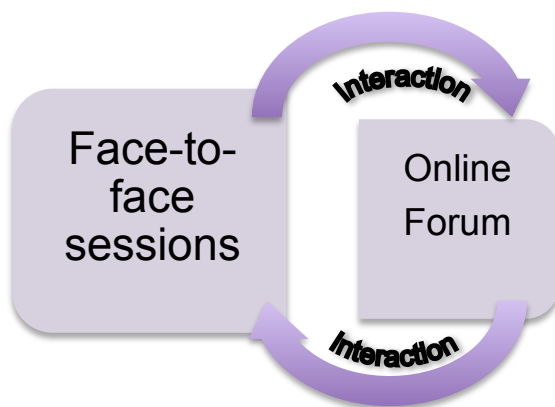
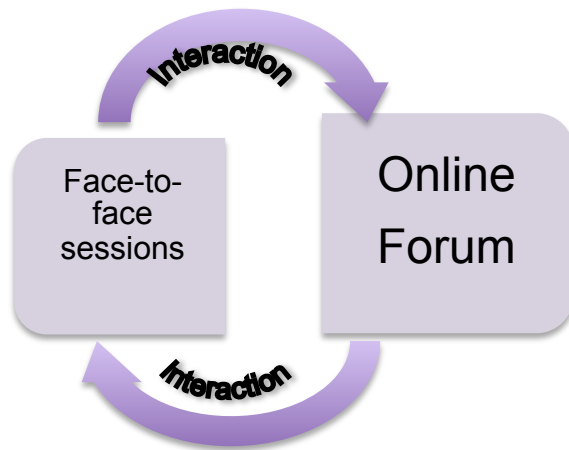


Figure 8

Blended Community: Majority Contributor in Online Forum



In iteration one, although the two face-to-face sessions were comparable to those in the second iteration, the online component was described as “clunky” and “unfriendly”. This led to the impression of three separate stories rather than a connected single narrative due to the lack of ongoing dialogue that could link the sessions together. In addition, there were huge differences in the amount of participation among individuals, impacting the cohesive nature – the fluidity across boundaries – needed for a blended CoP. By contrast, the community formed in the second iteration felt singular in nature, as if there was one narrative among the participants. Conversations that began in the face-to-face session continued to the online forum, then circled back again to the next face-to-face session. Moreover, there was more consistency in the overall participation for the five group members.

Although there was face-saving, politeness, and camaraderie during the face-to-face sessions of both studies, only in iteration two were these actions taken online. In the second iteration, there were several examples of rapport building online, such as when Saffron wrote, “as I am sure you all can relate to” after describing her curriculum issue. During a post regarding

difficulty with her administration, Sparrow wrote an update to a dilemma originally discussed during the November face-to-face session. Sparrow then immediately posted again stating, “I realize that's a really vague post, but hopefully y'all remember all of the craziness I'm alluding to.” The subtext here is *I don't actually need to tell you about the past because you were there with me*. This sense of history with one another, along with the overwhelming feeling of a shared struggle, is poignant and relevant in terms of how this blended community formed in the second iteration.

Another way the second iteration CoP created a sense of blendedness was the notion of “being on the same wavelength” (Edelsky, 1981, p. 197). Edelsky (1981) proposed there were two types of “collaborative conversational floors” (p. 196). One kind was a “free-for-all” type of conversation in which there was less structure; more frequently there was the “more orderly” dialogue in which “the impression was that several people were on the same wavelength” (p. 197). In these types of conversations, the participants would have marked rhythm and intonation. In the case of computer-mediated communication, such as the online platform of this study, “the analysis of ‘floor’ should take into account not only individual messages, but patterns of participation and response across messages” (Herring, 2010, p. 8). In iteration two, an online conversation about administrative issues led the members of the CoP to be on the same wavelength with each other:

Paloma: Soooooo ... today my administration asked me to leave my class and go teach the AIG classes. Help?!?!

Sparrow: Eek! What are your initial thoughts? Is the AIG small pullout groups or a class?

Dove: Oh wow! Like Sparrow, I'm wondering what your initial thoughts are? Is that of interest to you? I'm guessing if it is it would be of more interest if you didn't have to leave your class mid year. I could see you really enjoying it because of the independence and flexibility it allows but ow!

The use of the terms “Help?!?!?”, “Eek!”, and “wow” created a sense of *we get each other*. This atmosphere of the same wavelength is apparent in their responses as they attempted to console each other by showing support in this shared struggle. Furthermore, in this same conversation, there is the repetition of the question “What are your initial thoughts?” by Dove. By repeating Sparrow’s question, she is forming a rapport on a meta-level, as Tannen (1993) posited, “It is a ratification of the other’s words, evidence of participation in the same universe of discourse” (p. 185).

The combination of these examples, along with their familiarity with one another and the online platform, led to a smoother narrative for the participants. While iteration one felt like three separate sessions, iteration two existed as one narrative. Noted by Dove in her January post-interview, she thought there was a “natural progression” to the blended community. Another revealing response was by Paloma, who when asked her opinion about how the second iteration had worked, replied, “Seamlessly. It’s been a great experience. Like, the bridge between sessions, it’s been great.” The outcome of iteration two was the creation of a blended CoP: *joint enterprise* occurred as the dilemmas and stories were told; *shared repertoire* was established through the building of the relationships; and *mutual engagement* continued as these participants supported each other in the ongoing blended community.

Referring back to Figure 5 as a model for blended communities, the second iteration more closely resembled this ideal as communication was carried over between the face-to-face and online sessions. On the other hand, the first iteration could be considered a quasi-blended community, as the group members participated in the way best suited to their needs, not necessarily following the ideal model. For instance, the conversational floor in these instances resembled the “free-for-all” described by Edelsky (1981), with little uptake across participants.

Although not matching the theoretical model, it still met the needs of participants such as Linnet and Phoebe, who were more comfortable in the online context, as well as participants who preferred the face-to-face sessions, like Paloma in the first iteration.

Teacher Learning: Comparison of the Iterations

In simple terms, there was teacher learning present in both iterations of the study. Moreover, this sharing of knowledge was beneficial to the group members. There are examples of back-and-forth dialogue from each session, whether face-to-face or online, of teacher learning. In these examples, the novice teachers either mentioned strategies or ideas they had learned from one another, or engaged in conversations focused on problem solving.

However, there were some differences between the two iterations. In the first iteration, the learning in the face-to-face CoPs surpassed by far the learning that occurred in the on-line forum. Furthermore, the learning happened in a singular nature, with no connections made between the face-to-face and online communities. In contrast, the second iteration was more conversational *across* the sessions and learning occurred somewhat equally within each of the sessions, face-to-face and on-line. Paloma described the online community as “the bridge between sessions” – teacher learning traveled across that bridge as evidenced in the data. The connections made in the second iteration boosted the ability to share knowledge and provide strategies in a continuous manner. Therefore, although iteration one demonstrated that teacher learning occurred, it was in the second iteration where teacher learning was more fluid.

What enabled Iteration Two to become a blended community?

Taking into account the transcripts from all six R&Rs as well as the pre- and post-interviews, there was a similar nature to the fellowship experienced in the face-to-face sessions of both studies as well as how the studies benefitted participants in their most comfortable

format. However, there was a contrast in the blended nature of the CoPs, with iteration two feeling singular in nature, one session flowed into the on-line context which flowed into the next face-to-face session whereas the components of iteration one felt more disjointed. I now turn to what could account for these distinctions between the two iterations, specifically the roles of technology, facilitation, and participants' relationships as well as the timing of the individual sessions.

Technology

The decision to change the online platform between the iterations was motivated by participants' feedback in their post-interviews. Unhappy with the inconvenient moodle, participants suggested the switch to Facebook. This platform was more familiar to the participants, it was an extension of their regular on-line practice, and was therefore more comfortable and accessible. All five participants in the second iteration had accounts on the website prior to the study, ergo there was an easy transition to this platform. As a consequence of this change, there was a sense that the participants were able to use this type of technology more often and with more enthusiasm and more ease. Moreover, Facebook allowed the participants to reveal more personal aspects of their lives. Paloma noted thus in her post-interview in January:

Being connected to Sparrow via Facebook allowed me to, like, see her pictures from Thailand. And there is something, like, richer about that because I know her better as a human. So Facebook helped to get to know everyone as more than the sum of their classroom.

The ability to see a fuller picture of other participants' lives was beneficial to the development of stronger relationships within this CoP. There was a fluidity evident in and across the site as participants wove in and out of each others teaching and non-teaching lives. As the study came to a close, the participants continued to engage with one another online, posting to the Facebook community and providing feedback to one another via the social media platform.

My facilitation

As a former elementary teacher and current graduate student in education, the chance to facilitate an ongoing discussion with novice elementary teachers was an advantageous opportunity. Prior to the study, I led R&R group discussions for over 2 years, and I was well aware of the procedures for the face-to-face sessions. In addition, I felt an online component would supplement these sessions. When I began to consider my role in the online community, I was cognizant of how my participation would impact the CoP in the online forum. As Lai, Pratt, Anderson, and Stigler (2006) noted, “The role of the online moderator was identified as critical in sustaining the online community over an extended period and enhanced the learning function” (p. 58).

In the face-to-face community, a prior routine had been established by R&R directors. This included a statement regarding how participation was encouraged, as *all dilemmas are treated equally* during the sessions. In my role as facilitator, I began the conversation prompting the participants with a question. For example, in the May session, I asked, “So, does anyone have anything they’d like to start with today?” leading Raven to give an update on a past dilemma. This was typical of how dialogue flowed in the face-to-face sessions, with me prompting the participants when there were long pauses in the conversation. During some sessions, 20 or more minutes would elapse before I would speak to the group. Although I would occasionally make commentary regarding their dilemmas, I tried to remain a neutral figure, providing guidance when necessary, but more often creating opportunities for the participants to share their issues.

In regards to the online community during the first iteration, I followed a protocol in which I would prompt the online community every Sunday evening. For example, in the first week I asked about testing procedures in their schools. Then, I would monitor the moodle,

observing their responses but not posting directly on the community discussion board. After reviewing the data from the online community and post-interviews from iteration one, I decided to change both the online platform and how I participated in the community. The rationale for changing my participation was due to my reflections on the first iteration, as I felt that the participants needed more prompting from me in order to elicit more interaction. Therefore, the protocol for the second iteration more closely resembled how I facilitate a face-to-face session of R&R. At the beginning of a face-to-face session, I began by prompting for participants' dilemmas, asking questions, and contributing when there were longer pauses in the conversation. Upon reviewing an audiotape of a face-to-face session, I noted that I spoke much more at the beginning of a session than towards the end. Bearing this in mind, I decided to treat the online community in the same way: at the beginning, I posted several times a week as well as responded to participants' posts if there had been several days with no responses from fellow participants. After the participants began posting more, I slowly faded away, only posting when prompted directly by a participant. Therefore, the different ways I facilitated created variations between the iterations.

Relationships between participants

This study began in March 2014 and concluded in January 2015, with the iterations lasting 3 months each. During the 6 months of the study, there were four group members who participated in both iterations. As a result, there was a history for four out of five participants in the second iteration. Paloma, Dove, Sparrow, and Phoebe began iteration two with some partial background knowledge, eliminating the *getting to know you* period for those four members. This longevity in their relationship is important, as it enhanced the community and built trust among the participants (Kirkup, 2002). As these participants built stronger bonds, their emotional

attachments to each other grew, ergo creating a stronger sense of community. Paloma explained in her post-interview in January, “These, these participants I really connect with, especially from the continuity from having been in groups with them last year.”

In contrast to the other four members, Saffron was a brand new member to R&R in November 2015. Consequently, she only knew R&R to exist as a blended community. Essentially, the blended community of the second iteration is *all she knew* within the R&R context. Saffron noted in her post-interview:

[In the first R&R session] we built the foundation of feeling comfortable with each other, you know that very first time, and that continued thru to the online portion and again, that made me feel even more comfortable. And ... although I haven't seen [the group] in so long, we've had this online community, so the comfort level is still there.

For Saffron, the online community was the natural extension of the face-to-face sessions.

Although admittedly being reserved in both the face-to-face session and online forum, her confidence grew as she began to form stronger relationships with fellow members during the second face-to-face session. This directly relates to Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation, as Saffron was becoming more confident in her responses as the lines between the experienced and inexperienced blurred.

Timing of the iterations

In addition, there was variation in the study in regards to when the study started: for iteration one, the study began with the third face-to-face R&R session of the school year, whereas the second iteration began at the first face-to-face R&R of the following school year. This timing of when the iterations began may have made a difference in the level of participation of the group members. As Linnet noted in her post-interview, “I just wish we could have had it [the online forum] even sooner! If we could do it from the beginning next time!”

Furthermore, in the first iteration the group members did not have to commit to attend all sessions of the study, creating gaps in the flow of blended nature. This differed from the second iteration in which the group members made a commitment to participate in all three sessions of the iteration. In her post-interview in January, Paloma explained how her participation changed from past R&R sessions;

My participation was enhanced [during the second iteration], because there isn't as much ground to cover in between each session. Like maybe in the early years, in the early years, there would be new people to fill in about my own professional dilemmas and the context. And then also have to hear ALL of their context before we could get to their issue ... and so, I feel like, my participation and the conversation in general is richer because we don't have to overcome much before we get to the topic.

Several other participants reiterated this notion of a “richer” conversation in their post-interviews. Furthermore, it is notable that the online forum of the first iteration was not used after the final R&R face-to-face session. In contrast, the blended community that began during the second iteration is ongoing, as members continue to communicate via the online platform between face-to-face sessions.

The blended CoP of the second iteration was overall more unified than the first iteration, as there was fluidity to the three sessions. The participants were connected to one another over the course of the iteration by participating in each other's lives via both mediums. Referenced earlier, Hew and Hara (2007) recognized several motivating factors for why teachers share knowledge with one another. One of those factors was altruism. In the second iteration, there was a sense of benevolence among the members, as they strove to find solutions, or at least add a ‘*yeah, me too*’ to the conversation. The altruistic actions of the participants added to the blended nature of the CoP.

Implications

While my aspiration was to find the “golden ticket” for novice teacher support through studying these blended CoPs, unfortunately that was not the outcome of this study. In reality, I came to recognize how engaging in the singular activity of a blended discourse community is not enough to sustain these teachers in the profession. Although the participants’ overall opinions of the blended CoP were positive, there was a sense that it was similar to a group therapy session, whereas directly afterwards they felt revived and energized by the conversations, but the “real world” of teaching would eventually erode these motivating feelings. While blended communities can be an important piece of the puzzle of teacher induction, they are not the only piece. My research further supports the need to have *systems* in place for novice teachers from the beginning of their careers, systems that include but are not limited to blended communities. The question that remains is what combination of support is essential for these teachers to stay in the profession. The implications that follow will focus on the particular needs of novice teachers and how blended communities can assist in this need, but are not a panacea for what is needed during the first years in the classroom. Furthermore, I provide a discussion on the implications of blended CoP for professional development.

Needs of novice teachers

Unfortunately, the outcome for many new teachers ends with almost half of them leaving the profession within the first 5 years of the job (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Regrettably, this fact was a reality for at least two members of the second iteration of the study. Both Sparrow and Paloma discussed their “exit plans” for leaving their teaching jobs at the end of the school year during the January face-to-face session.

For Paloma, she had “already submitted my paperwork that said I wasn’t returning at the end of the year” after 5 years at her school. Throughout both iterations of the study, Paloma struggled with a difficult administration, but more often she would mention a lack of “allies” at her school and the community at large. During the March pre-interview she noted, “Well, when I first participated [in R&R] I was having some struggles at my school and I just wanted an outlet because I didn’t have anyone in my school to talk to.” This statement revealed the lack of support provided to Paloma by her own school district, as she did not feel as if her school community could provide the assistance she needed in her struggles. She went on to explain:

R&R is unique in that it gives teachers a platform in which to be treated as a professional. I think a lot of times, schools have the perception of young teachers are not as knowledgeable as the older teachers, and whenever you reach out for help in the school, um, it is in a diminutive way and someone has to swoop in and save you rather than ah, rather than treating me like a professional who just needs another professional opinion.

So, although she found the R&R sessions to be beneficial, they simply were not enough for her to stay in teaching, as Paloma stated in January she is “going to leave no matter what.” When asked what her future plans were, Paloma talked about creating a sustainable farm in her community and “maybe ultimately fold education into that somehow.”

I think as I spend time on [the farm] and get away from teaching and like get myself back, we’ll be able to see if we want to stay in community. ... But we [Paloma and her spouse] think we might start to like [the community] better if we aren’t teaching. So, I don’t know we’ll but at least through August, we are accounted for [in terms of finances]. So I’ll wait tables for a while.

Paloma, after 5 years in the classroom, was leaving the profession, with only a vague idea of what her future career would be.

Although not as definitive as Paloma in her decision, Sparrow was experiencing many of the same feelings as she struggled to find satisfaction in her position as an elementary ESL teacher. Directly after Paloma announced her leaving teaching, Sparrow began to describe her

frustration with her school environment. After she gave more background on her school situation, Sparrow expressed her discontent:

I'm thinking about things a lot. I have many thoughts. I'm just filled with thoughts all the time. I just have to do something that I believe in more firmly and not just keep subscribing to this [existing situation]. I just can't do it. It's, it's just bullshit.

After further inquiry from group members, Sparrow explained:

I just want the whole system to be different. How do I make that happen? It's like do I keep doing the best I can in the situation where I am or try to make it better elsewhere, I don't know. It just makes me feel really small.

Sparrow continued to explain how she had begun to write cover letters for jobs that were not in schools, and her husband pointed out:

If you are not working with kids you're going to hate it. I was like, I know, because the part of my job that I love is [the students] ... but I just don't know how much more I can stomach.

Although Sparrow had not approached her administration about leaving her position, she had imagined what she would say to them: "I'm like, look, I can't do this next year. I can't do this without a team. I can't do this without this being different. I can't and I know that's a conversation that we have to have." Sparrow finished by noting, "I can't even get close to them to talk to them about it. They're just so inaccessible." Compounded by myriad struggles, Sparrow was not conclusive in her decision to leave her position, but she was certain in that she was not receiving the support she needed to be successful in her job. Another note of interest in regards to both Paloma and Sparrow discussing leaving the teaching profession: when each was describing their plans for discontinuing their teaching careers, no one spoke up in an attempt to change their minds.

The implications here are clear: School systems are not doing enough to support novice teachers in their jobs. It takes more than a blended CoP; multiple supports need to be in place for

a new teacher to be successful in this profession. Although the blended CoP that emerged from the second iteration of the study was successful in terms of providing some support to these novice teachers, more has to be done. Blended CoPs coupled with well-planned teacher induction spread out over several years would be a start. Providing several avenues of support, via face-to-face and online professional development, could be of consequence to a community of novice teachers.

Organization of a blended CoP for professional development

Another implication arising from this study is how to best structure a blended CoP within the larger professional development context. Although success was found in the second iteration in terms of the various ways members were able to participate and receive support, this is just one piece of what is a larger puzzle on how to best support novice teachers in their careers. Embedding blended communities within other types of professional development would create opportunities for teachers to have support both face-to-face and online, therefore providing a continuous system of blended assistance available at any time. The opportunity to participate in the way most comfortable and convenient is one of the distinctive features of a blended community. For example, Linnet and Phoebe, participants in separate iterations, were more active during the sessions most fitting for their needs. Both attended all the sessions in their respective iterations, but the flexibility of the *blended-ness* allowed each participant to engage in her own way. By providing blended experiences in several professional development contexts, the empty space that typically exists between face-to-face sessions could be filled with ongoing online interaction, providing the opportunity for a richer professional development experience.

In addition, over the course of the two iterations, I learned there are certain discursive practices and repertoires that make a CoP productive. Unfortunately we do not prepare novice

teachers in our schools of education to adequately engage in discussions with their colleagues, particularly online. This can be seen in the online community of the first iteration. We, as education professionals and researchers, need to help novice teachers learn what patterns of discourse make for productive work in CoPs. There are necessary discursive features that create a productive space for teachers, as seen across the second iteration. Therefore because teachers are both the reason for having CoPs as well as play the main role in how they develop from the inside, teacher educators need to provide opportunities for explicit discussion about dialogic patterns — face-to-face and online. We often assume our preservice teachers are members of a digital generation and that with that label come the strategies for effective and productive online collaboration. As evidenced in iteration one, that may not be the case. We need to provide our students with opportunities to try these conversations out and then provide feedback to move these conversations to the level of productive CoPs..

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research in this area is necessary, as this study only captured the story of two attempted blended Communities of Practice comprised of novice teachers. With thousands of new teachers entering school systems every year, blended communities need to be researched as a viable source of support.

Researching different models of blended CoPs will be important in order to discover the best ways to support all teachers. For example, in smaller CoPs, novice teachers working in the same school district could establish relationships with one another as they work through professional dilemmas during the tumultuous first years of teaching. Research could include how blended CoPs improve teacher retention, as well as provide an opportunity to see if there are changes in teacher efficacy and student achievement, among others.

As the demand for quality professional development continues to increase, it will be important to conduct further research on whether the use of online communities can augment the support given to not just to novice teachers but for all teachers. Although the current study focused on teachers in the first 5 years of their jobs, veteran teachers are also at risk for attrition. Looking into how blended CoPs support teachers with varying levels of experience would be beneficial to the teaching community at large.

Finally, it will be important to research how to sustain and maintain this type of professional development therefore a long-term approach to blended CoPs is necessary. A study conducted with teachers participating in blended CoPs over a span of several years would help to better understand if blended CoPs provide long-term assistance to their members.

Conclusion

With over 18 years experience working in the field of education, I am highly aware of how difficult it is to be a teacher, let alone a novice teacher. Even when I was struggling during my own first years in the profession, I knew that I could not make it on my own: I was going to need help, and I was going to need it fast. Fortunately, I found it in a multitude of ways, with quality mentors and ongoing professional development ... and this was prior to Web 2.0 technology!

Now, as the use of popular social media technologies continues to gain momentum, blended Communities of Practice are becoming more accessible, and more appealing, to the novice teacher community. Opportunities to engage professionally with colleagues in both face-to-face and online platforms are increasing the flow of conversation and creating new avenues for more fluid and more flexible professional development. The current study adds to the body of knowledge on the creation of blended Communities of Practice for novice teacher learning,

especially in the area of how blended CoP can provide support to people in many ways. In other words, blended CoPs can be different things to different people, but with an ultimate outcome of providing a level of support that is most comfortable for all of its members. There is potential for blended CoPs to transform professional development and with that, stem the tide of teachers leaving the profession early in their careers.

APPENDIX A: PRE AND POST INTERVIEW GUIDES

Pre-Interview Guide:
March 2014

Demographics:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade do you teach?
3. How many years have you participated in the *Reconnect and Recharge* (R&R) program?

Inquiry:

1. What factors led you to choose to be a participant in R&R?
2. In your eyes, what do you think R&R provides to beginning teachers?
3. What are the main reasons you choose to continue to participate in R&R?
4. As a novice teacher, are there any particular ways that R&R provided support? Did these differ from support you have received elsewhere? Describe in detail and use examples if possible.
5. What are your main incentives for participating in R&R, if any?
6. Are there any drawbacks from participating in R&R? If so, what are they?
7. There can be six weeks to three months times in between R&R sessions. How do you feel about the amount of time in between sessions of R&R?
8. How would you describe your participation in the face-to-face R&R? Were there moments when you choose not to participate? If so, why?
9. How comfortable are you with the prospect of sharing dilemmas and/or contributing your opinions with the group in an online format?
10. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the support in this novice teacher community better?
11. Do you have any concerns or questions regarding the upcoming online R&R?
12. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Post-interview Guide:
May 2014

Demographics:

1. Are you still in the same teaching position as when this study began? If not, what are you teaching?

Inquiry:

1. Do you feel that R&R is an effective support system for novice teachers? In what ways? In what ways is it not?
2. Specifically in terms of the R&R face-to-face sessions, how, if any, did you feel the conversations surrounding “dilemmas of practice” supported you in your teaching? In what ways did you feel you were not supported?
3. Did you feel that you supported your fellow community members during the face-to-face sessions? In what ways? If not, what made you feel that way?
4. How would you describe your participation in the face-to-face R&R? Were there moments when you chose not to participate?
5. Specifically in terms of the R&R online community, how, if any, did you feel the virtual conversations supported you in your teaching? In what ways was it not supportive or helpful?
6. Did you feel that you supported your fellow community members in the online community? In what ways? If not, what made you feel that way?
7. How would you describe your participation in the online R&R? Were there moments when you chose not to participate?
8. For you, was there a difference in the support you felt during the face-to-face sessions versus the online community? Describe in detail and use examples if possible.
9. Did you participate differently in the face-to-face versus the online community?
10. Did the addition of the online technology component impact the final face-to-face session in May (or January)? In what ways?
11. What changes would you make, if any, to the face-to-face component?
12. What changes would you make, if any, to the online component?
13. How did you think the face-to-face and online components worked in conjunction with

each other?

14. As a novice teacher, were there any particular ways that R&R, either face-to-face and/or online, provided support? Did these differ from support you have received elsewhere? Describe in detail and use examples if possible.

15. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the support in this CoP better?

16. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Pre-Interview Guide:
November 2014

Demographics:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade do you teach?
3. How many years have you participated in the *Reconnect and Recharge* (R&R) program?

Inquiry into support:

4. What factors led you to choose to be a participant in R&R?
5. In your eyes, what do you think R&R provides to beginning teachers?
6. As a novice teacher, are there any particular ways that you look for support in your profession? Describe in detail and use examples if possible.

Inquiry into Web 2.0 knowledge:

7. Are you comfortable with technology? What types of technology do you use professionally? What types of technology do you use in your personal time?
8. Are you able to access the Internet at your school, either via school-owned or personal technology?
9. On average, how much time do you spend per week online for personal reasons?
10. On average, how much time do you spend per week online for professional reasons?
11. How comfortable are you with the prospect of sharing dilemmas and/or contributing your opinions with the group in an online format?

12. Do you have any concerns or questions regarding the upcoming online R&R?

13. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Post-interview Guide:
January 2015

Demographics:

1. Are you still in the same teaching position as when this study began? If not, what are you teaching?

Inquiry into CoP:

1. How would you describe your participation in the face-to-face R&R? Were there moments when you chose not to participate? If so, why?
2. How would you describe your participation in the online R&R? Were there moments when you chose not to participate? If so, why?
3. On average, how many hours per week did you spend on the R&R website?
4. How would you describe your overall participation in R&R? Was your participation the same when R&R was face-to-face versus online? If it differed, how so?
5. Did you feel that you were engaged with your fellow community members in the online community? In what ways? If not, why?
6. For you, was there a difference in the way you interacted during the face-to-face sessions versus the online community? Describe in detail and use examples if possible.
7. What changes would you make, if any, to the online component?
8. As a novice teacher, were there any particular ways that R&R, either face-to-face and/or online, provided support? Did these differ from support you have received elsewhere? Describe in detail and use examples if possible.
9. Overall, do you feel like you belong to a community during the face-to-face sessions? Please describe.
10. Overall, do you feel like you belong to a community during the online sessions? Please describe.
11. Did the blended community experience feel singular in nature or like two different experiences? What made it feel the way it did?
12. How did you think the face-to-face and online components worked together?

13. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

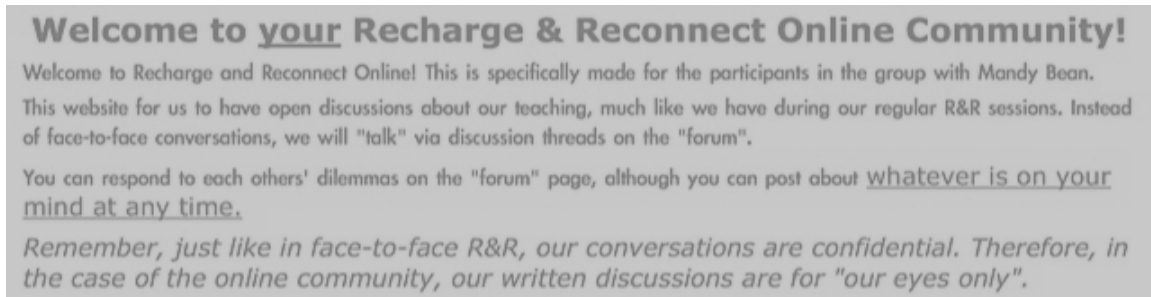
APPENDIX B: CONTENT THEMES AND EXAMPLES

- Collaboration Dilemma with Colleagues
- Collaboration Dilemma with Parents
- Curriculum Dilemma
- Informative
- Logistic Problems
- Policy Issues
- School-Community Access/Obstacles
- Student Dilemmas
- Teacher Internal Conflicts

Type of dilemma	Example
Collaboration Dilemmas with Colleagues	Difference in teaching styles
Collaboration Dilemmas with Parents	Difficulty communicating students' needs to parents
Curriculum Dilemmas	Lack of instructional time due to standardized testing
Informative	Date of next face-to-face session
Logistic Problems	Technology is unreliable
Policy Issues	Following state and district level protocol
School/Community Access Obstacles	Lack of bilingual speakers for communication
Student Dilemmas	Student behavior problems
Teacher Internal Conflicts	Contemplating career choices

APPENDIX C: IMAGES OF ITERATION ONE ONLINE COMMUNITY

Homepage of Online Forum:



Example of Weekly Reminder:

R&R Discussions

Hi R&R online!

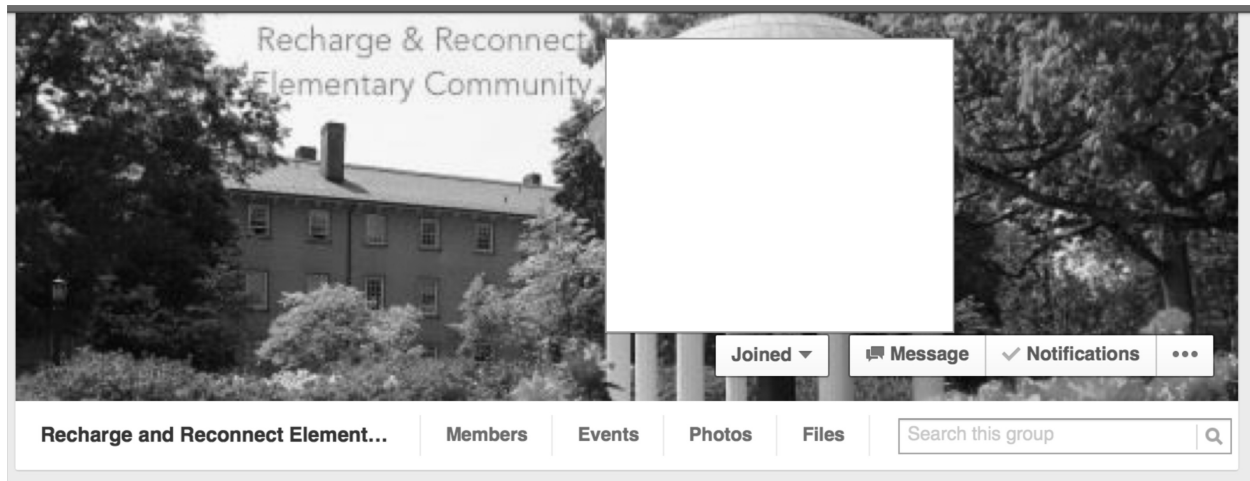
How is your week? Any updates/changes/news?

See you this Saturday for face-to-face online!

Also, please bring your calendar to schedule a post-interview with Mandy.

APPENDIX D: IMAGES OF ITERATION TWO ONLINE COMMUNITY

Image of Homepage Banner:



Example of Discussion Thread:



APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE OF THINKING OUT LOUD

During a Teacher Internal Conflict, Paloma explains her struggle in the daily life of teaching:

Paloma: Yeah. And a lot of time I can be in that place. Really a lot of time, a lot of days the way I make it through, well at least these kids respect each other, at least these kids don't get yelled at all day long, a lot of times that's the only way I make my existence. And then sometimes, and then things go wrong and you're like, I forgot I was in survival mode that whole time. I feel like I am always using a strategy. I feel like I wake up in the morning like like what am I going to do like to bring positivity to this situation. Like when I go to [the grocery store] and a parent stops me and is like, for one, asks me why I am buying vegetables for one, but also complains about literally anything at like I yeah, I am always using a strategy. It's never like okay this is my life. It's like how am I getting through of this day of crazy pants without crying. Not that I feel like I am on the verge of tears everyday but I always feel like I am using a strategy like I am not living my regular life, so.

APPENDIX F: EXAMPLE OF LAUGHTER

This dialogue occurred after a discussion on what the Kindergarten class at Finch's school should do while other grades are taking standardized tests at the end of the school year.

Finch: It's better than last year when the assistant principal said you can take the kids outside as long as you can keep them quiet. Well, how is that going to happen? [laughs]

Raven: He's such a smart man! [sarcastic]

Finch: Well, ha, that will work! I will take them outside and say you guys can play but use your indoor voices [laughter]

Raven: That's right!

Paloma: Have you [the assistant principal] ever met a kindergartner, ever? [laughter]

APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE OF JUSTIFYING EACH OTHER

This exchange occurred after Sparrow had explained her struggle to manage the overcrowding at her school.

Sparrow: Yeah. So I see that maintaining contact with [the diverse school community] as a huge part of my job but it's become so huge that I can't do anything else.

Raven: Yeah. Right. Right. It's hard.

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